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SHORT STORIES

The millionaire seized Jules by the throat. Would the man do as he was bid?

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ONE PENNY.] [No. 797. Week Ending April 9th, 1904.

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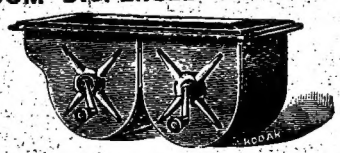

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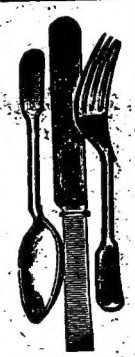

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SHORT STORIES

No. 797.] Week Ending April 9th, 1904. [One Penny.

THIS SPLENDID NEW SERIAL HAS JUST BEGUN.

PHANTOM SHADOWS

A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

Synopsis of First Chapters.

Mr. Theodore Racksole, American multi-millionaire, accompanied by his daughter Nella, arrives at the GrandBabylon Hotel. At dinner he orders Jules, the dignified head-waiter, to bring him a steak and a bottle of Bass.

Jules is annoyed at this strange order, and refuses to carry out the millionaire's instructions.

Calmly, without a word of expostulation, Racksole seeks out Félix Babylon, the proprietor of the hotel, and in less than twenty minutes contracts have been signed between the two parties, by which it is transferred to Racksole for the sum of £400,000.

The millionaire then orders the *chef*, Rocco, to cook him a steak, and to see that it is served, with a bottle of Bass, by Jules at their table in the dining-room.

When Racksole returns to his daughter, he finds that with her is a Mr. Reginald Dimmock, English companion to Prince Aribert of Posen. As Jules is serving the steak, Racksole sees him give a significant, ominous wink to this Dimmock. In the course of conversation, the latter says that his master is on the point of coming to the hotel.

Racksole stays talking very late that night to Mr. Babylon, and as he is making his way to his room in the small hours of the morning, he sees Jules emerging from Room 111—Nella Racksole's! What can it mean? Ten silent strides, and the millionaire, revolver in hand, is upon him.

THIRD CHAPTER.

The Struggle Between the Millionaire and Jules.

"One word, my friend," the millionaire began, carelessly waving the revolver in the air. Jules was indubitably startled, but by an admirable exercise of self-control he recovered possession of his faculties in a second.

"Sir?" said Jules.

"I just want to be informed what the dickens you were doing in No. 111 a moment ago?"

"I had been requested to go there," was the calm response.

"You are a liar, and not a very clever one. That is my daughter's room. Now—out with it, before I decide whether to shoot you, or throw you into the street."

Racksole seized him by the throat.

"Excuse me, sir, No. 111 is occupied by a gentleman."

"I advise you that it is a serious error of judgment to contradict me, my friend. Don't do it again. We will go to the room together, and you shall prove that the occupant is a gentleman, and not my daughter."

"Impossible, sir," said Jules.

"Scarcely that," said Racksole, and he took Jules by the sleeve. The millionaire knew for a certainty that Nella occupied No. 111, for he had examined the room with her, and himself seen that the trunks and her maid and herself had arrived there in safety. "Now open the door," whispered Racksole when they reached No. 111.

"I must knock."

"That is just what you mustn't do. Open it."

Confronted by the revolver, Jules readily obeyed, yet with a deprecatory gesture, as though he would not be responsible for this outrage against the decorum of hotel life. Racksole entered. The room was brilliantly lighted.

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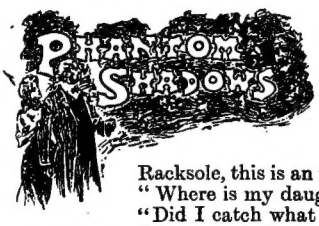

'A visitor, who insists on seeing you, sir," said Jules, and fled.

Mr. Reginald Dimmock, still in evening dress, and smoking a cigarette, rose hurriedly from a table.

"Hello, my dear Mr. Racksole, this is an unexpected—ah—pleasure."

"Where is my daughter? This is her room."

"Did I catch what you said, Mr. Racksole?"

"I ventured to remark that this is Miss Racksole's room."

"My good sir," answered Dimmock, "you must be mad to dream of such a thing. Only my respect for your daughter prevents me from expelling you forcibly, for such an extraordinary suggestion."

A small spot half-way down the bridge of the millionaire's nose turned suddenly white.

"With your permission," he said, in a low, calm voice, "I will examine the dressing-room and the bath-room."

"Just listen to me," Dimmock urged, in a milder tone.

"I'll listen to you afterwards, my young friend," said Racksole, and he proceeded to search the bath-room and the dressing-room without any result whatever. "Lest my attitude might be open to misconstruction, Mr. Dimmock, I may as well tell you that I have the most perfect confidence in my daughter, who is as well able to take care of herself as any woman I ever met, but since you entered it there have been one or two rather mysterious occurrences in this hotel. That is all." Feeling a draught of air on his shoulder, Racksole turned to the window. "For instance," he added, "I perceive that this window is broken, badly broken, and from the outside. Now, how could that have occurred?"

"If you will kindly hear reason, Mr. Racksole," said Dimmock in his best diplomatic manner, "I will endeavour to explain things to you. I regarded your first question to me when you entered my room as being offensively put, but I now see that you had some justification." He smiled politely.

"I was passing along this corridor about eleven o'clock, when I found Miss Racksole in a difficulty with the hotel servants. Miss Racksole was retiring to rest in this room when a large stone, which must have been thrown from the Embankment, broke the window, as you see. Apart from the discomfort of the broken window, she did not care to remain in the room. She argued that where one stone had come another might follow. She therefore insisted on her room being changed. The servants said that there was no other room available with a dressing-room and bath-room attached, and your daughter made a point of these matters. I at once offered to exchange apartments with her. She did me the honour to accept my offer. Our respective belongings were moved—and that is all. Miss Racksole is at this moment, I trust, asleep in No. 124."

Theodore Racksole looked at the young man for a few seconds in silence.

There was a faint knock at the door.

"Come in," said Racksole loudly.

Someone pushed open the door, but remained standing on the mat. It was Nella's maid, in a dressing-gown.

"Miss Racksole's compliments, and a thousand excuses, but a book of hers was left on the mantelshelf in this room. She cannot sleep, and wishes to read."

"Mr. Dimmock, I tender my apologies—my formal apologies," said Racksole, when the girl had gone away with the book. "Good-night."

"Pray don't mention it," said Dimmock suavely—and bowed him out.

FOURTH CHAPTER.
Entrance of the Prince.

Nevertheless, sundry small things weighed on Racksole's mind. First there was Jules' wink. Then there was the ribbon on the door-handle and Jules' visit to No. 111, and the broken window—broken from the outside. Racksole did not forget that the time was three a.m. He slept but little that night, but he was glad that he had bought the Grand Babylon Hotel.

It was an acquisition which seemed to promise fun and diversion.

The next morning he came across Mr. Babylon early.

"I have emptied my private room of all personal papers," said Babylon, "and it is now at your disposal. I purpose, if agreeable to yourself, to stay on in the hotel as a guest for the present. We have much to settle with regard to the completion of the purchase, and also there are things which you might want to ask me. Also, to tell the truth I am not anxious to leave the old place with too much suddenness. It will be a wrench to me."

"I shall be delighted if you will stay," said the millionaire, "but it must be as my guest, not as the guest of the hotel."

"You are very kind."

"As for wishing to consult you, no doubt I shall have need to do so, but I must say that the show seems to run itself."

"Ah!" said Babylon thoughtfully. "I have heard of hotels that run themselves. If they do, you may be sure that they obey the laws of gravity and run downwards. You will have your hands full. For example, have you yet heard about Miss Spencer?"

"No," said Racksole. "What of her?"

"She has mysteriously vanished during the night, and nobody appears to be able to throw any light on the affair. Her room is empty, her boxes gone. You will want someone to take her place, and that someone will not be very easy to get."

"H'm!" Racksole said, after a pause. "Hers is not the only post that falls vacant to-day."

A little later, the millionaire installed himself in the late owner's private room and rang the bell.

"I want Jules," he said to the page.

While waiting for Jules, Racksole considered the question of Miss Spencer's disappearance.

"Good morning, Jules," was his cheerful greeting, when the imperturbable waiter arrived.

"Good morning, sir."

"Take a chair."

"Thank you, sir."

"We have met before this morning, Jules."

"Yes, sir, at three a.m."

"Rather strange about Miss Spencer's departure, is it not?" suggested Racksole.

"It is remarkable, sir."

"You are aware, of course, that Mr. Babylon has transferred all his interests in this hotel to me?"

"I have been informed to that effect, sir."

"I suppose you know everything that goes on in the hotel, Jules?"

"As the head waiter, sir, it is my business to keep a general eye on things."

"You speak very good English for a foreigner, Jules."

"For a foreigner, sir! I am an Englishman, a Hertfordshire man, born and bred. Perhaps my name has misled you, sir. I am only called Jules because the head waiter of any really high-class hotel must have either a French or an Italian name."

"I see," said Racksole. "I think you must be rather a clever person, Jules."

"That is not for me to say, sir."

"How long has the hotel enjoyed the advantage of your services?"

"A little over twenty years."

"That is a long time to be in one place. Don't you think it's time you got out of the rut. You are still young, and might make a reputation for yourself in another and wider sphere." Racksole looked at the man steadily, and his glance was as steadily returned.

"You aren't satisfied with me, sir?"

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"To be frank, Jules, I think—I think you—er—wink too much. And I think that it is regrettable when a head waiter falls into a habit of taking white ribbons from the handles of bedroom doors at three in the morning."

Jules started slightly.

"I see how it is, sir. You wish me to go, and one pretext, if I may use the term, is as good as another. Very well, I can't say that I'm surprised. It sometimes happens that there is incompatibility of temper between a hotel proprietor and his head waiter, and then unless one of them goes, the hotel is likely to suffer. I will go, Mr. Racksole. In fact, I had already thought of giving notice."

The millionaire smiled appreciatively.

"What wages do you require in lieu of notice? It is my intention that you leave the hotel within an hour."

"I require no wages in lieu of notice, sir. I would scorn to accept anything. And I will leave the hotel in fifteen minutes."

"Good day, then. You have my good wishes and my admiration, so long as you keep out of my hotel."

"Good day, sir. And thank you."

Racksole got up.

"By the way, Jules, it will be useless for you to apply to any other first-rate European hotel for a post, because I shall take measures which will insure the rejection of any such application."

"Without discussing the question whether or not there aren't at least half a dozen hotels in London alone that would jump for joy at the chance of getting me," answered Jules, "I may tell you, sir, that I shall retire from my profession."

"Really! You will turn your brains to a different channel."

"No, sir. I shall take rooms in Albemarle Street or Jermyn Street, and just be content to be a man-about-town. I have saved some twenty thousand pounds—a mere trifle, but sufficient for my needs, and I shall now proceed to enjoy it. Pardon me for troubling you with my personal affairs. And good day, again."

That afternoon Racksole went with Félix Babylon first to a firm of solicitors in the City, and then to a stockbroker, in order to carry out the practical details of the purchase of the hotel.

"I mean to settle in England," said Racksole, as they were coming back. "It is the only country——" And he stopped.

"The only country?"

"The only country where you can invest money and spend money with a feeling of security. In the United States there is nothing worth spending money on, nothing to buy. In France or Italy, there is no real security."

"But surely you are a true American?" questioned Babylon.

"I am a true American," said Racksole, "but my father, who began by being a bedmaker at an Oxford college, and ultimately made ten million dollars out of iron in Pittsburg—my father took the wise precaution of having me educated in England. I had my three years at Oxford, like any son of the upper middle class! It did me good. It has been worth more to me than many successful speculations. It taught me that the English language is different from, and better than, the American language, and that there is something—I haven't yet found out exactly what—in English life that Americans will never get. Why," he added, "in the United States we still bribe our judges and our newspapers. And we talk of the nineteenth century as though it was the beginning of the world. Yes, I shall transfer my securities to London. I shall build a house in Park Lane, and I shall buy some immemorial country seat with a history as long as the A. T. and S. railroad, and I shall calmly and gradually settle down. D'you know—I am rather a good-natured man for a millionaire, and of a social disposition, and yet I haven't six real friends in the whole of New York City. Think of that!"

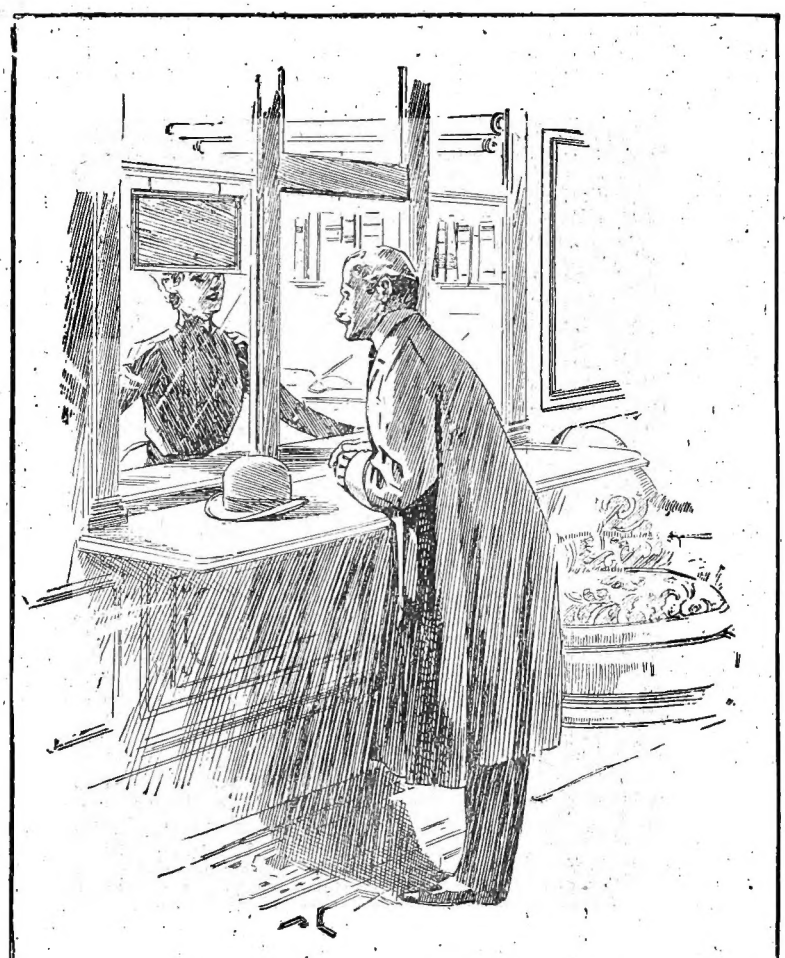
"And I," said Babylon, "have no friends except the friends of my boyhood in Lausanne. I have spent thirty years in England, and gained nothing but a perfect knowledge of the English language and as much gold coin as would fill a rather large box."

These two plutocrats breathed a simultaneous sigh.

"Talking of gold coin," said Racksole, "how much money should you think Jules has contrived to amass while he has been with you?"

"Oh!" Babylon smiled. "I should not like to guess. He has had unique opportunities—unique opportunities."

"Should you



Nella saw a young man of about thirty years at the window. It was his Serene Highness Prince Aribert of Posen.

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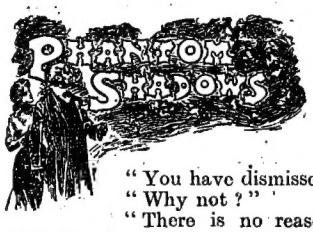

consider twenty thousand an extraordinary sum under the circumstances?"

"Not at all. Has he been confiding in you?"

"Somewhat. I have dismissed him."

"You have dismissed him?"

"Why not?"

"There is no reason why not. But I have felt inclined to dismiss him for the past ten years, and never found courage to do it."

"It was a perfectly simple proceeding, I assure you. Before I had done with him, I rather liked the fellow."

"Miss Spencer and Jules—both gone in one day!" mused Félix Babylon.

"And no one to take their places," said Racksole. "And yet the hotel continues its way!"

And when Racksole reached the Grand Babylon he found that Miss Spencer's chair in the bureau was occupied by a stately and imperious girl, dressed becomingly in black.

"Heavens! Nella!" he cried, going to the bureau. "What are you doing here?"

"I am taking Miss Spencer's place. I want to help you with your hotel, dad. I fancy I shall make an excellent hotel clerk. I have arranged with a Miss Selina Smith, one of the typewriters in the office, to put me up to all the tips and tricks, and I shall do very well,"

"But, look here, Helen Racksole. We shall have the whole of London talking about this thing—the greatest of all American heiresses a hotel clerk! And I came here for quiet and rest!"

"I suppose it was for the sake of quiet and rest that you bought the hotel, papa?"

"You would insist on the steak," he retorted. "Get out of this, on the instant."

"Here I am, here I stay," said Nella, and deliberately laughed at her parent.

Just then the face of a fair-haired man of about thirty years appeared at the bureau window. He was very well-dressed, very aristocratic in his pose, and he seemed rather angry.

He looked fixedly at Nella, and started back.

"Ach!" he exclaimed. "You!"

"Yes, your Highness, it is indeed I. Father, this is his Serene Highness Prince Aribert of Posen—one of our most esteemed customers."

"You know my name, Fräulein?" the newcomer murmured in German.

"Certainly, Prince," Nella replied sweetly. "You were plain Count Steenbock last Spring in Paris—doubtless travelling incognito——"

"Silence," he intreated, with a wave of the hand, and his forehead went as white as paper.

FIFTH CHAPTER.

What Occurred to Reginald Dimmock.

In another moment they were all three talking quite easily, and with at any rate an appearance of being natural. Prince Aribert became suave, even deferential to Nella, and more friendly towards Nella's father than their respective positions demanded. The latter amused himself by studying this sprig of royalty, the first with whom he had ever come into contact. He decided that the young fellow was personable enough, "had no frills on him," and would make an exceptionally good commercial traveller for a first-class firm. Such was Theodore Racksole's preliminary estimate of the man who might one day be the reigning Grand Duke of Posen.

It occurred to Nella, and she smiled at the idea, that the bureau of the hotel was scarcely the correct place in which to receive this august young man. There he stood, with his head half-way through the bureau window, negligently leaning against the woodwork, just as though he were a stockbroker or the manager of a New York burlesque company.

"Is your Highness travelling quite alone?" she asked.

"By a series of accidents I am," he said: "My equerry was to have met me at Charing Cross, but he failed to do so—I cannot imagine why."

"Mr. Dimmock?" questioned Racksole.

"Yes, Dimmock. I do not remember that he ever missed an appointment before. You know him? He has been here?"

"He dined with us last night," said Racksole—"on Nella's invitation," he added maliciously; "but to-day we have seen nothing of him. I know, however, that he has engaged the State apartments, and also a suite adjoining the State apartments—No. 55. That is so, isn't it, Nella?"

"Yes, papa," she said, having first demurely examined a ledger. "Your Highness would doubtless like to be conducted to your room—apartments I mean." Then Nella laughed deliberately at the Prince, and said, "I don't know who is the proper person to conduct you, and that's a fact. The truth is that papa and I are rather raw yet in the hotel line. You see, we only bought the place last night."

"You have bought the hotel!" exclaimed the Prince.

"That's so," said Racksole.

"And Félix Babylon has gone?"

"He is going, if he has not already gone,"

"Ah! I see," said the Prince; "this is one of your American 'strokes.' You have bought to sell again, is that not it? You are on your holidays, but you cannot resist making a few thousands by way of relaxation. I have heard of such things."

"We shan't sell again, Prince, until we are tired of our bargain. Sometimes we tire very quickly, and sometimes we don't. It depends—eh? what?" Racksole broke off suddenly to attend to a servant in livery who had quietly entered the bureau and was making urgent, mysterious signs to him.

"If you please, sir," the man by frantic gestures implored Mr. Theodore Racksole to come out.

"Pray don't let me detain you, Mr. Racksole," said the Prince, and therefore the proprietor of the Grand Babylon departed after the servant, with a queer, curt little bow to Prince Aribert.

"Mayn't I come inside?" said the Prince to Nella immediately the millionaire had gone.

"Impossible, Prince," Nella laughed. "The rule against visitors entering this bureau is frightfully strict."

"How do you know the rule is so strict if you only came into possession last night?"

"I know because I made the rule myself this morning, your Highness."

"But seriously, Miss Racksole, I want to talk to you."

"Do you want to talk to me as Prince Aribert or as the friend—the acquaintance—whom I knew in Paris last year?"

"As the friend, dear lady, if I may use the term."

"And you are sure that you would not like first to be conducted to your apartments?"

"Not yet. I will wait till Dimmock comes; he cannot fail to be here soon."

"Then we will have tea served in father's private room—the proprietor's private room, you know."

"Good!" he said.

Nella talked through a telephone, and rang several bells, and behaved generally in a manner calculated to prove to Princes and to whomever it might concern that she was a young woman of business instincts and training, and then she stepped down from her chair of office, emerged from the bureau, and, preceded by two menials, led Prince Aribert to the Louis XV. chamber in which her father and Félix Babylon had had their long confabulation on the previous evening.

"What do you want to talk to me about?" she asked her companion, as she poured out for him a second cup of tea. The Prince looked at her for a moment as he took the proffered cup, and being a young man of sane, healthy instincts, he could think of nothing for the moment except her loveliness.

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Nella was indeed beautiful that afternoon. The beauty of even the most beautiful woman ebbs and flows from hour to hour. Nella's this afternoon was at the flood. Vivacious, alert, imperious and yet ineffably sweet, she seemed to radiate the very joy and exuberance of life.

"I have forgotten," he said.

"You have forgotten! That is surely very wrong of you? You gave me to understand that it was something terribly important. But, of course, I knew it couldn't be, because no man, and especially no Prince, ever discussed anything really important with a woman."

"Recollect, Miss Racksole, that this afternoon, here, I am not the Prince."

"You are Count Steenbock, is that it?"

He started. "For you only," he said, unconsciously lowering his voice. "Miss Racksole, I particularly wish that no one here should know that I was in Paris last Spring."

"An affair of State?" she smiled.

"An affair of State," he replied soberly. "Even Dimmock doesn't know. It was strange that we should be fellow guests at that quiet, out-of-the-way hotel—strange but delightful. I shall never forget that rainy afternoon that we spent together in the museum of the Trocadéro. Let us talk about that."

"About the rain, or the museum?"

"I shall never forget that afternoon," he repeated, ignoring the lightness of her question.

"Nor I," she murmured, corresponding with his mood.

"You, too, enjoyed it?" he said eagerly.

"The sculptures were magnificent," she replied, hastily glancing at the ceiling.

"Ah! So they were! Tell me, Miss Racksole, how did you discover my identity?"

"I must not say," she answered. "That is my secret. Do not seek to penetrate it. Who knows what horrors you might discover if you probed too far?" She laughed, but she laughed alone. The Prince remained pensive—as it were, brooding.

"I never hoped to see you again," he said.

"Why not?"

"One never sees again those whom one wishes to see."

"As for me, I was perfectly convinced that we should meet again."

"Why?"

"Because I always get what I want."

"Then you wanted to see me again?"

"Certainly. You interested me extremely. I have never met another man who could talk so well about sculpture as the Count Steenbock."

"Do you really always get what you want, Miss Racksole?"

"Of course."

"That is because your father is so rich, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, it isn't!" she said. "It's simply because I always do get what I want. It's got nothing to do with father at all."

"But Mr. Racksole is extremely wealthy?"

"Wealthy isn't the word, Count. There is no word. It's positively awful the amount of dollars poor papa makes. And the worst of it is he can't help it. He told me once that when a man made ten millions no power on earth could stop those ten millions from growing into twenty. And so it continues. I spend what I can, but I can't come near coping with it; and, of course, papa is no use whatever at spending."

"Dimmock—dead!"

"And you have no mother?"

"Who told you I had no mother?" she asked quickly.

"I—er—inquired about you," he said, with equal candour and humility.

"In spite of the fact that you never hoped to see me again?"

"Yes, in spite of that."

"How funny!" she said, and lapsed into a meditative silence.

"Yours must be a wonderful existence," said the Prince. "I envy you."

"You envy me—what? My father's wealth?"

"No," he said; "your freedom and your responsibilities."

"I have no responsibilities," she remarked.

"Pardon me," he said; "you have, and the time is coming when you will feel them."

"I'm only a girl," she murmured with sudden simplicity. "As for you, Count, surely you have sufficient responsibilities of your own?"

"I?" he said sadly. "I have no responsibilities. I am a nobody—a Serene Highness who has to pretend to be very important, always taking immense care never to do anything that a Serene Highness ought not to do. Bah!"

"But if your nephew, Prince Eugen, were to die, would you not come to the throne, and would you not then have these responsibilities which you so much desire?"

"Eugen die?" said Prince Aribert, in a curious tone

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"Impossible. He is the perfection of health. In three months he will be married. No, I shall never be anything but a Serene Highness, the most despicable of God's creatures."

"But what about the State secret which you mentioned? Is not that a responsibility?"

"Ah!" he said. "That is over. That belongs to the past. It was an accident in my dull career. I shall never be Count Steenbock again."

"Who knows?" she said. "By the way, is not Prince Eugen coming here to-day? Mr. Dimmock told us so."

"See!" answered the Prince, standing up and bending over her. "I am going to confide in you. I don't know why, but I am."

"Don't betray State secrets," she warned him, smiling into his face.

But just then the door of the room was unceremoniously opened.

"Go right in," said a voice sharply. It was Theodore Racksole's.

Two men entered, bearing a prone form on a stretcher, and Racksole followed them. Nella sprang up. Racksole stared to see his daughter.

"I didn't know you were in here, Nell. Here," to the two men, "out again."

"Why!" exclaimed Nella, gazing fearfully at the form on the stretcher, "it's Mr. Dimmock!"

"It is," her father acquiesced. "He's dead," he added laconically. "I'd have broken it to you more gently had I known. Your pardon, Prince." There was a pause.

"Dimmock dead!" Prince Aribert whispered under his breath, and he knelt down by the side of the stretcher. "What does this mean?"

"The poor fellow was just walking across the quadrangle towards the portico when he fell down. A commissionaire who saw him says he was walking very quickly. At first I thought it was sunstroke, but it couldn't have been, though the weather certainly is rather warm. It must be heart disease. But anyhow, he's dead. We did what we could. I've sent for a doctor, and for the police. I suppose there'll have to be an inquest."

The millionaire pays an early morning visit to the kitchen.

Theodore Racksole stopped, and in an awkward solemn silence they all gazed at the dead youth. His features were slightly drawn and his eyes closed; that was all. He might have been asleep.

"My poor Dimmock!" exclaimed the Prince, his voice broken. "And I was angry because the lad did not meet me at Charing Cross!"

"Are you sure he is dead, father?" Nella said.

"You'd better go away, Nella," was Racksole's only reply; but the girl stood still, and began to sob quietly. On the previous night she had secretly made fun of Reginald Dimmock. She had deliberately set herself to get information from him on a topic in which she happened to be specially interested and she had got it, laughing the while at his youthful crudities—his vanity, his transparent cunning, his absurd airs. She had not liked him; she had even distrusted him, and decided that he was not "nice." But now, as he lay on the stretcher, these things were forgotten. She went so far as to reproach herself for them. Such is the strange commanding power of death.

"Oblige me by taking the poor fellow to my apartments," said the Prince, with a gesture to the attendants. "Surely it is time the doctor came." Racksole felt suddenly at that moment he was nothing but a mere hotel proprietor with an awkward affair on his hands. For a fraction of a second he wished he had never bought the Grand Babylon.

A quarter of an hour later Prince Aribert, Theodore Racksole, and a doctor, and an inspector of police were in the Prince's reception-room. They had just come from an antechamber, in which lay the mortal remains of Reginald Dimmock.

"Well?" said Racksole, glancing at the doctor.

The doctor was a big, boyish-looking man, with keen, quizzical eyes.

"It is not heart disease," said the doctor.

"Not heart disease?"

"No."

"Then what is it?" asked the Prince.

"I may be able to answer that question after the post-mortem," said the doctor. "I certainly can't answer it now The symptoms are unusual to a degree."

The inspector of police began to write in a note-book.

SIXTH CHAPTER.

In the Gold Room.

At the Grand Babylon a great ball was given that night in the Gold Room, a huge saloon attached to the hotel, though scarcely part of it, and certainly less exclusive than the hotel itself. Theodore Racksole knew nothing of the affair, except that it was an entertainment offered by a Mr. and Mrs. Sampson Levi to their friends. Who Mr. and Mrs. Sampson Levi were he did not know, nor could anyone tell him anything about them except that Mr. Sampson Levi was a prominent member of that part of the Stock Exchange familiarly called the Kaffir Circus, and that his wife was a stout lady with an aquiline nose and many diamonds, and that they were very rich and very hospitable. Theodore Racksole did not want a ball in his hotel that evening, but the arrangements for it had gone too far, so the ball went forward.

The Gold Room of the Grand Babylon was built for a ball-room. A balcony, supported by arches faced with gilt and lapis-lazuli ran round it, and from this vantage men and maidens and chaperons who could not or would not dance might survey the scene. Everyone knew this, and most people took advantage of it. What everyone did not know—what no one knew—was that higher up than the balcony there was a little barred window in the end wall from which the hotel authorities might keep a watchful eye, not only on

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the dancers, but also on the occupants of the balcony itself.

It may seem incredible to the uninitiated that the guests at any social gathering held in so gorgeous and renowned an apartment as the Gold Room of the Grand Babylon should need the observation of a watchful eye. Yet so it was. Strange matters and unexpected faces had been descried from that little window, and more than one European detective had kept vigil there with the most eminently satisfactory results.

At eleven o'clock Theodore Racksole, afflicted by vexation of spirits, found himself gazing idly through the little barred window. Nella was with him. Together they had been wandering about the corridors of the hotel, still strange to them both, and it was quite by accident that they had lighted upon the small room which had a surreptitious view of Mr. and Mrs. Sampson Levi's ball. Except for the light of the chandelier of the ballroom the little cubicle was in darkness. Nella was looking through the window; her father stood behind.

"I wonder which is Mrs. Sampson Levi," Nella said, "and whether she matches her name. Wouldn't you love to have a name like that, father—something that people could take hold of—instead of Racksole?"

The sound of violins and a confused murmur of voices rose gently up to them.

"Umph!" said Theodore. "Confound those evening papers!" he added, inconsequently but with sincerity.

"Father, you're very horrid to-night. What have the evening papers been doing?"

"Well, my young lady, they've got me in for one, and you for another; and they're manufacturing mysteries like fun. It's young Dimmock's death that has started 'em. It'll be all over New York to-morrow morning, too. The worst of it is that Babylon has gone off to Switzerland."

"Why?"

"Don't know. Sudden fancy, I guess, for his native heath."

"What difference does it make to you?"

"None. Only I feel sort of lonesome. I feel I want some one to lean up against in running this hotel."

"Father, if you have that feeling you must be getting ill."

"Yes," he sighed, "I admit it's unusual with me. But perhaps you haven't grasped the fact, Nella, that we're in the middle of a rather queer business"

"You mean about poor Mr. Dimmock?"

"Partly Dimmock and partly other things. First of all, that Miss Spencer, or whatever her wretched name is, mysteriously disappears. Then there was the stone thrown into your bedroom. Then I caught that rascal Jules conspiring with Dimmock at three o'clock in the morning. Then your precious Prince Aribert arrives without any suite—which I believe is a most peculiar and wicked thing for a Prince to do—and moreover I find my daughter on very intimate terms with the said Prince. Then young Dimmock goes and dies, and there is to be an inquest; then Prince Eugen and his suite, who were expected here for dinner, fail to turn up at all——"

"Prince Eugen has not come?"

"He has not; and Uncle Aribert is in a terrible stew about him, and telegraphing all over Europe. Altogether, things are working up pretty lively."

"Do you really think, dad, there was anything between Jules and poor Mr. Dimmock?"

"Think! I know! I tell you I saw that scamp give Dimmock a wink last night at dinner that might have meant—well!"

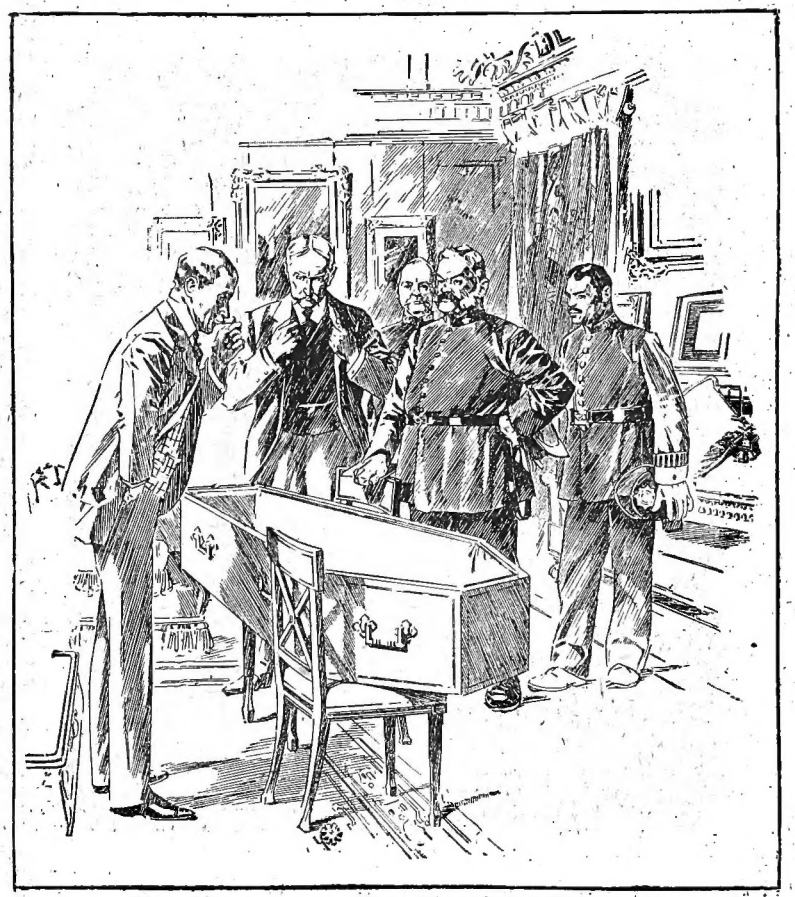
"So you caught that wink, did you, dad?"

"Why? Did you?"

"Of course, dad. I was going to tell you about it."

The millionaire grunted.

"Look here, father," Nella whispered suddenly, and pointed to the balcony immediately below them. "Who's that?" She indicated a man with a bald patch on the back of his head, who was propping himself up against the railing of the balcony and gazing steadily into the ball-room.



The coffin was empty. Dimmock's body had disappeared!

"Well, who is it?"

"Isn't it Jules?"

"Gemini! By the beard of the prophet, it is!"

"Perhaps Mr. Jules is a guest of Mrs. Sampson Levi."

"Guest or no guest, he goes out of this hotel, even if I have to throw him out myself."

Theodore Racksole disappeared without another word, and Nella followed him. But when the millionaire arrived on the balcony floor he could see nothing of Jules, neither there nor in the ball-room itself. Saying no word aloud, but quietly whispering wicked expletives, he searched everywhere in vain, and then, at last, by tortuous stairways and corridors returned to his original post of observation that he might survey the place anew from that vantage ground. To his surprise he found a man in the dark little room, watching the

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scene of the ball as intently as he himself had been doing a few minutes before. Hearing footsteps, the man turned with a start.

It was Jules.

The two exchanged glances in the half light for a second.

"Good evening, Mr. Racksole," said Jules calmly. "I must apologise for being here."

"Force of habit, I suppose;" said Theodore Racksole drily.

"Just so, sir."

"I fancied I had forbidden you to re-enter this hotel?"

"I thought your order applied only to my professional capacity. I am here to-night as the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Sampson Levi."

"In your new *rôle* of man-about-town, eh?"

"Exactly."

"But I don't allow men-about-town up here, my friend."

"For being up here I have already apologised."

"Then, having apologised, you had better depart; that is my disinterested advice to you."

"Good-night, sir."

"And, I say, Mr. Jules, if Mr. and Mrs. Sampson Levi, or any other Hebrews or Christians, should invite you again to my hotel you will oblige me by declining the invitation. You'll find that will be the safest course for you. I hope you fully understand me. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

Before midnight struck Theodore Racksole had ascertained that the invitation list of Mr. and Mrs. Sampson Levi, though a somewhat lengthy one, contained no reference to any such person as Jules.

He sat up very late. To be precise, he sat up all night. He was a man who, by dint of training, could comfortably dispense with sleep when he felt so inclined, or when circumstances made such a course advisable. He walked to and fro in his room, and cogitated as few people besides Theodore Racksole could cogitate. At 6 a.m. he took a stroll round the business part of his premises, and watched the supplies come in from Covent Garden, from Smithfield, from Billingsgate, and from other strange places. He found the proceedings of the kitchen department quite interesting, and made mental notes of things that he would have altered, of men whose wages he would increase and men whose wages he would reduce. At 7 a.m. he happened to be standing near the luggage lift, and witnessed the descent of vast quantities of luggage, and its disappearance into a Carter Paterson van.

"Whose luggage is that?" he inquired peremptorily.

The luggage clerk, with an aggrieved expression, explained to him that it was the luggage of nobody in particular, that it belonged to various guests, and was bound for various destinations; that it was, in fact, "expressed" luggage dispatched in advance, and that a similar quantity of it left the hotel every morning about that hour.

Theodore Racksole walked away, and breakfasted upon one cup of tea and half a slice of toast.

The above is a reduced facsimile of the picture which will be printed in colours on the cover of next week's Short Stories. *It illustrates how Nella sees something very suspicious in the demeanour of the old lady at the table, and, watching her, notices her take a pellet of paper from the tart she is eating. Nella immediately decides on her course of action.*

At eno'clock he was informed that the inspector of police desired to see him. The inspector had come, he said, to superintend the removal of the body of Reginald Dimmock to the mortuary adjoining the place of inquest, and a suitable vehicle waited at the back entrance of the hotel.

The inspector had also brought subpœnas for himself and Prince Aribert of Posen and the commissionaire to attend the inquest.

"I thought Mr. Dimmock's remains were removed last night," said Racksole wearily.

"No, sir. The fact is the van was engaged on another job."

The inspector went away to perform his duties.

In a few minutes a message came from him requesting Mr. Racksole to be good enough to come to him on the first floor. Racksole went. In the ante-room, where the body of Reginald Dimmock had originally been placed, were the inspector and Prince Aribert, and two policemen.

"Well?" said Racksole, after he and the Prince had exchanged bows. Then he saw a coffin laid across two chairs. "I see a coffin has been obtained," he remarked. "But it's empty."

"Just so," said the inspector. "The body of the deceased has disappeared. And his Serene Highness Prince Aribert informs me that though he has occupied a room immediately opposite, on the other side of the corridor, he can throw no light on the affair."

"Indeed, I cannot!" said the Prince, deeply distressed.

"Well, this licks creation," murmured Racksole.

(Another long instalment next week.)

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WHITE LILACS.

Telling the Influence They Had on a Man's Life.

"WHO is he?"

Mrs. Allingham held the snowy card lightly in her jewelled hand. The bit of dainty pasteboard read: "Keith Montrose."

Her daughter Genevieve turned from the mirror where she was arranging her magnificent hair.

"Why, it's one of Alec's friends! It must be Colonel Montrose, whom he met at Baden."

Mrs. Allingham swept back her satin cap-strings.

"I've no doubt it is. Dear me, where's my handkerchief? He must bring news from Alec—oh, I hope nothing has happened!"

Vieve looped up a curl.

"If he's nice, mamma, send up for me."

Mrs. Allingham bustled away.

It is just possible that when Colonel Keith Montrose saw this fat, over-dressed, bustling woman, he wondered whence the handsome student, Alec Allingham, derived his grace and refinement. But when Vieve—in response to her mother's summons—appeared, he might have wondered still more at the family beauty. Vieve turned her lustrous orbs full upon the handsomest man she had ever seen, and immediately began planning how to capture him.

The Colonel was just home—had seen young Allingham six weeks before. He had promised to make reports of his prosperity to his mother.

"You will stay and dine with us, Colonel?" purred Mrs. Allingham.

Vieve lifted her white lids alluringly.

"I shall be very happy to," said the Colonel.

Neither at Baden nor at Paris had he seen such hair and eyes.

Dinner was late. The Colonel and Vieve walked out on the long verandah in the Spring sunshine. The Colonel could not keep his eyes from the coils of raven hair against the ivory neck, and the curve of her ripe lips as she stood beside him smiling.

"You are Alec's only sister, Miss Allingham?"

"Oh, no—there is Henry."

There was no explanation of this ambiguous reply, for a ringing voice broke out, singing:

"*Thy blue bonnet, when thou came hither,*
Could scarce keep out the wind and weather,
But now it has turned to a hat and feather—
Thy bonnet has blown, whither, oh, whither?"

The ringing young voice carolled on.

Vieve rose, mortified and angry.

"Shall we go in, Colonel? The sun is rather warm."

The Colonel rose instantly, but made a feint of examining a flower at the door while he listened again.

"*Thy sword at thy back was a great black blade,*
With a basket-hilt of iron made,
And now a long rapier doth hang at thy side,
And huffingly doth this bonny Scot ride!"

The last line was given with an indescribable emphasis. In spite of himself the Colonel laughed. Vieve's cheeks were crimson.

"She is only a child, Colonel, and in spite of all mamma can do, she is very noisy."

"Your sister?"

"Yes; it is Henriette."

The next moment they went down to dinner. Mr. Allingham was in town. The guest sat down with the ladies.

At first there was only Miss Allingham and her mother, but half through the first course the door swung open, and a tall girl, with black hair falling over her shoulders, wearing a crimson dress, and bearing a branch of white lilacs in her hand, nonchalantly entered the room. Vieve glanced apprehensively at her mother.

"Henriette," warningly, "are you quite ready for dinner?"

No answer. The branch went rustling upon a table. A little velvet hat, with a white plume of the fragrant blossoms went after it.

"I don't want any dinner."

"Why, my dear?"

"Shay is dead!"—with a tumultuous sob. A door slammed and the girl with the unconquerable spirit was gone.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Mrs. Allingham, as though words would not express her feelings.

"I wish all her dogs were dead!" said Vieve, charitably.

"If it were not dogs, it would be something worse. No one can tell what I suffer with that child."

"The black sheep!" thought the colonel, full of pity for the quivering lips he had caught sight of. The girl was, perhaps, fifteen years old. She had splendid eyes, like Vieve, but the expression of her face was totally different.

It was a face that haunted Colonel Montrose. The forehead under the jetty tresses had a splendid breadth. The eyes were full of passion, yet the pale cheek had a strangely chastened look for a child.

But Henry did not appear again, much to her sister's relief, and before sunset the Colonel took his departure. He went down the garden-path, Vieve's tones honey-sweet in his mind; but just beyond the garden, at the edge of the avenue, the breath of fresh lilacs bathed his face, and the sound of passionate sobbing smote his ear.

After listening a moment he turned aside from the path, and below the garden wall, beneath a thicket of lilacs in bloom, he caught sight of a crimson dress. He gazed until he made out, in the gloom, a little brown hand, a prostrate figure, and a head of hair. For a moment he was at a loss what to do. Then he went forward slowly, his step falling softly in the grass. The sobs were growing only heavier. He discovered a little mound, and saw how it was—the child was weeping over Shay's grave.

"My child," he said gently, "is it right to grieve so for a dog?"

The girl looked up.

"He was only a dog, but he was all I had to love me," she said.

The Colonel sat down upon a stone.

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"Will you tell me about him?"

"Do you really care?" said the girl.

She looked at him wistfully.

"Yes," he said, gravely.

"He knew so much!" said poor Henry. "Once, when I was alone in the woods, I fell into the lake, and he plunged in and pulled me out; and when I came to my senses, I was lying on the bank, and he was lapping my face. I walked home in my wet clothes, two miles, and was ill for a month with fever. I did not dare tell mamma how it happened, for fear she would scold me; but all the time Shay lay on a mat by the bed, and would not leave me, though they whipped him to drive him out. He was a St. Bernard—so handsome! He was so good—so good! And he *always* loved me!" And Henry's locks went down upon the fresh mound in another paroxysm of grief.

"If I might send you another," ventured the Colonel. "The St. Bernards are always brave and affectionate. He would soon get attached to you."

"No, no!" cried Henry. "You are very good. But I don't want another dog; they always die. Rose, Shay's mother, died, and—and everything that loves me dies!" and the child shook with her sobs.

Words had no effect. She would not be comforted, and at last Colonel Montrose rose and went on his way, wondering, and yet touched to the heart. And for years he never inhaled the odour of white lilacs without recalling the girl whom he had so vainly tried to console under their shadow—the odd, wild girl, who sang rollicking songs, and roamed in the woods, and *would* not be conventional.

* * * * *

The splendid seaside Pavilion was crowded with guests. Aristocracy had, at last, found a suitable place in which it could worship Nature—everything at the Pavilion was smoothed and cultivated and gilded to perfection. And here millionaires lolled in the sea-breezes, and swung down to the front in their carriages, and found the beach delightful.

It was quite late in the summer when a party of cavalry officers rode out from the town and arrived at the Pavilion on the day previous to a grand ball. The horses curvetted and pulled hard at their silver bits, and the riders doffed their military caps right and left to the smiling ladies upon the beach.

"General Montrose is the handsomest man in the service!" they averred.

The General and his suite met with a universal welcome. Cavalry officers are treasures in a ball-room. Already there was a great fluttering among the ladies.

"The General has blue eyes, and I know he prefers brunettes. I shall wear my pink *crêpe*," said Hallie Lee.

"What you wear will hardly matter," said her mother discontentedly. "You forget Miss Allingham."

Miss Hallie pulled her curls and pouted.

But the General was not a dancing man. When the waltzers tripped their lightest, and the music rang its sweetest he stood quietly talking with a knot of gentlemen.

"Have you seen our belle, General?" asked one of them.

"I have seen many beautiful ladies, Bromley, but I have not been told who bears off the palm."

"Then you have not seen Miss Allingham. I never saw such a woman off canvas."

"Is she present?"

"Yes, at the further end of the room—wearing a dress of white silk. We cannot see her face here. Shall we go that way?"

But half way across the hall General Montrose started and turned aside. He had met Henry Allingham's eyes.

He hardly knew why he avoided her—why he was conscious of a great confusion and pain. But, Heavens, how beautiful she was—far more so than Vieve had ever been. Vieve, who had married a poverty-stricken German baron, and had gone to Dresden.

It was not till late in the evening that he found himself in the vicinity of the brilliant belle. He had found Alec Allingham. It was the brother who presented him—and the beautiful Henry uttered a few silvery words, and then seemed to forget his existence.

"Spoilt," he muttered, bitterly, and turned coldly away.

It was not until then that he knew how he had held his memory of this girl as an assurance of the hearts of women.

"Now that she can make fools of men, she will not cry for a dog," he said cynically. "Well, I will never marry. I am too world-wise and heart-weary to value mere beauty in women. My life is more than half gone. Let the rest go quickly."

* * * * *

It was early morning—he was pacing the sands. One of the hotel boats, marked *Pavilion*, was floating at its moorings. He entered it, and rowed away.

The bay was smooth as glass. Far away in the shining water he saw a black object; for want of a better goal, he pulled towards it.

It was a low line of rocks covered with shells and seaweed. He moored his boat and sprang upon them, gathering a handful of the rosy shells, and tearing a strange sea-moss from a cleft. The sky was shining with the faint gold of the rising sun; the sea-birds screamed around him.

Suddenly he saw the boat, the only one in sight, drifting far out of his reach. It had not been securely moored, and had quickly yielded to the press of the water. The tide was coming in, and the boat was drifting to land.

"An absurd situation," he muttered.

He thought that was all, at first. Then he perceived that the rocks were below high-water mark, and the feeling of annoyance changed to one of horror. For he could not swim.

He measured his distance from the shore. It was so great that he could not make out the figures which he knew must, at that hour, be moving about the beach, and it was utterly unlikely that they would discover his situation.

He was to drown, then. He smiled, with pale lips.

The water had risen to his knees, when he heard a call:

"Courage!"

Then he heard the dip of oars; next, saw their flash, as a boat, bearing a cargo of lilacs, and rowed by a slight girlish figure, glided up to him. He stepped in, and sank down with a white cheek, saved from death.

For several moments he did not know his preserver. Half an hour's waiting for death had unnerved and weakened the man. But suddenly he felt to whom belonged the great eager eyes, so dark, so lustrous, fixed upon him.

"You are ill," said Miss Allingham. "Be patient; I shall row as fast as I can. The storm is growing very fast."

She pulled deftly. The boat shot ahead. There was a lilac bloom, white and fragrant, in her little velvet hat, a splendid glow upon her cheeks.

"I had been two miles up the shore to an old garden, for my favourite flower, when I met a boat of the Pavilion. I feared something was wrong, and so I kept on the alert until I discovered you. How fast the storm is coming!"

"Yes; it will overtake us. You should have saved yourself, and left me to my fate."

The boat was tossing like a cockle-shell, yet she showed no fear, only lifted her eyes to his face, at those hard words—so bitter, unnatural, ungrateful—with a pathetic reproach. Those eyes set his heart on fire; his lips and cheeks grew red with passion.

At that moment an oar broke. Henry uttered a cry.

"Let it go!" he cried hoarsely. "We will die together."

"No," she answered. "I mean to live. Can you scull?"

"Forgive me!" he exclaimed. "I am a brute."

He took the remaining oar from her hand. She smiled gloriously in his face.

"Beauty," he said, "why did you risk yourself to save me? What was I to you?"

"You were more than life to me," she answered. "It was for your love that I gave up my hoyden ways, and strove to grow wise and womanly. I think that you like me a little. Now—now," with a little arch smile, "will you scull to land?"

And while the white lilacs were yet in bloom, they were married.

Florence Martin.

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(4) When you have filled up your coupon, cut it out and keep it by you, together with the coupons which have appeared and will appear in SHORT STORIES.
(5) Each competitor may send only one set of coupons, but all the members of one household may compete. Each set will be accepted independently.
(6) In all cases the Editor's decision is final, and competitors may only enter on this condition.

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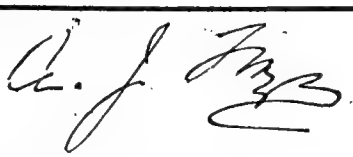
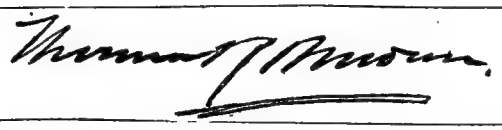
No. 24. 	
No. 25 	
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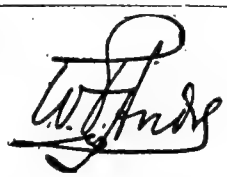
No. 27. 	
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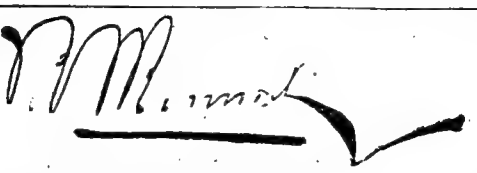
No. 29. 	

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My Ward's Conquest.

Telling How a Young and Beautiful Girl Captured a Whole Family.

WHILE sitting in my library one morning in July, I received a letter from the executors of the will of one Harold Marsden, informing me of the fact that the aforesaid Harold Marsden was dead, leaving a daughter and a large fortune, and—could my eyes deceive me?—I was appointed guardian of the daughter of the deceased.

Now to me, a man of forty years, who had travelled all my life, and seen enough of the fair sex to totally disgust me, this was anything but pleasant news. I had never seen this daughter of my college friend Harold; but I had heard rumours of a great beauty and flirt, and to have the young lady thrown at my head in this manner was anything but agreeable.

As I sat frowning and wondering how to get out of this difficulty, my good sister Mehitable, who kept house for me at my pretty country home, Grey Gables, entered.

"Why, Willis, you look troubled! What is the matter?"

And as I had always done from childhood, I straightway poured my troubles into the sympathetic ears of Mehitable.

"Why, that is news; but we must make the best of it."

"Well, what am I to do?"

"Do? Why, you are to write the poor child, and invite her here at once. Where is she?"

"The letter says she is at school."

"Of course, she is waiting to hear from you; and as I now have my flowers to attend to, I will leave you, and when I return I do not want to see that frown. This ward may prove a blessing instead of a calamity."

And so the letter was duly written and posted to Miss Muriel Marsden—the name was not bad, and I found myself repeating it, and wondering what sort of a girl this new ward of mine was.

At last I received a letter in a delicate, girlish hand, thanking me for my invitation, and stating that the writer would be with us on Thursday at 5 p.m., and this was Tuesday.

A letter from my scapegrace brother Jack, stated that he would be home from college Wednesday morning. I laid both letters down with a sigh. No more peace for me now, with a grown ward and my mischievous brother Jack in the house. Thursday arrived only too soon for me, and with it a telegram calling me to Narfield, a small town eight miles away.

"I will be back by the three o'clock train, in time to meet Miss Marsden, when she comes," I said to Mehitable; "and if I should not happen to get there, send Jack."

I could not finish my business as soon as I expected, and so had to go by the very train I expected my ward. As I took my seat facing two young ladies, I heard a bell-like voice exclaim:

"Oh, won't I lead him a life of it!"

And the older lady said to her companion:

"Well, you are capable of it."

Something in the smooth, clear voice reminded me of the letter I received on Tuesday, and I listened intently to try to catch more of the conversation.

"How old is he?" presently asked the old lady.

"Oh, about forty—a regular old fogey, and hates women."

"Well, you have the power to make him change his mind on that subject, if anyone has."

The other shrugged her shoulders in a manner unmistakably Frenchy, and laughed.

"Oh, I'll lead him a dance! I hear he has a younger brother."

"Muriel, you are a dreadful flirt."

"Now, Grace, do not scold; but here is Lakeville. Now to beard the lion in his den; the——"

I waited to hear no more, but hurrying from the station, rushed through the woods by a path that led to Grey Gables. Muriel! I knew it! And so this small, giddy creature was my ward, was to make my house her home hereafter, and had already designs on Jack.

Now, I liked a stately, dignified woman; but these giddy laughing butterflies—bah! I hated them. My conscience began to prick me for not honourably making myself known. But, pshaw! Jack was there, no doubt, and I could not endure a ride all the way to Grey Gables with that designing little creature.

As I neared the drawing-room windows, I heard a merry peal of laughter in a voice already hateful to me, and instead of going in to welcome her, I stole up to my rooms to dress for dinner. While dressing, I occasionally heard that ringing laugh. So she was one of these nuisances who laugh incessantly—how was I to bear it?

At last the dinner-bell rang, and as I looked in the glass I thought what a well-preserved man I was—no one would take me to be a day over thirty. So I mustered up courage, and walked down to the drawing-room.

The family had assembled; Mehitable, in her quiet, black gown, sat by the window knitting; Jack was leaning over a red easy-chair, in his usual graceful manner; and in the chair sat the small being I had already begun to hate. She was looking at Jack, and laughing at some remark he had just made.

As she heard the door she glanced up, and, seeing me, came quickly across the floor with a graceful, gliding movement, that reminded me of a snake, saying:

"I know this is my new guardian, so shall not wait for an introduction"—at the same time offering me her cool, little hand.

As I said some stiff words of welcome, I gazed at the most beautiful creature I had ever seen.

The dimpled, peach-bloom face, rosebud mouth, perfect teeth, and, above all, a pair of wonderfully-beautiful, brown

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eyes, as soft and pleading as a fawn's, all this framed in the fluffy golden hair, made a most beautiful picture.

She had changed her grey travelling dress for one of some soft, white clinging material, and a bunch of crimson roses gleamed bright and warm on her breast. But as I looked at the figure standing before me, the pleading look in the brown eyes only seemed to say "treachery," and my stiff, conventional greeting was hardly one in which to welcome a stranger.

In an instant the little figure was drawn proudly erect, and the eyes that a moment before were so soft and beautifully brown, flashed steely grey into mine; and deliberately turning her back to me, she walked to the window, and commenced talking to Mehitable.

At the dinner-table she was as bright and gay as ever, addressing all her remarks to Jack and Mehitable, never once looking at me. As we rose from the table, Mehitable said:

"Willis, perhaps Muriel would like to walk through the garden—we have some beautiful roses, dear."

I could see at once that Mehitable was completely captivated by the girl, and I waited anxiously for her answer.

"Oh, I would not trouble Mr. Craig. Jack will show me the roses, will you not?"

And so she called him Jack already. I groaned inwardly as I watched the two saunter down the garden path. Mehitable turned to me with her sweet smile, saying:

"Is she not lovely?"

"I have not noticed anything particularly lovely about her," was my cool answer.

"Now, Willis!"—and Mehitable's hand was laid approvingly on my arm. "After seeing her, will you persist in this insane dislike? She is a sweet, lovable child—a little wayward, perhaps, but you only know that from what you have heard."

"I detest flirts."

"You do not know she is a flirt."

"Well, enough said, Mehitable; the fact that she was thrust on me in this manner is very disagreeable," and, turning wearily, I left the room.

And so it went on, day after day, and week after week; it seemed as if the girl had bewitched them all; she called Mehitable "Auntie," and caressed her in that clinging manner I called "snaky." She and Jack were inseparable, and as for her behaviour to me, she showed her dislike in every word and look. She had not only captivated Mehitable and Jack, but everyone in the little village in which we lived seemed to worship her; I alone detested her. I could see only her utter heartlessness and fickleness.

At last a new actor appeared on the scene, in one Gerald Hastings, who, it appeared, had been an old lover of Muriel's. But the girl played with him, as she did with all others—one day all smiles and as gracious as a queen, the next cold, chilling, and indifferent. I at once took a great liking to Gerald Hastings, and invited him to Grey Gables. He accepted my invitation; and I plainly saw his passionate love for Muriel.

"What a capital thing it would be," thought I, "if I could marry her off to Hastings; he loves her devotedly." My conscience sometimes pricked me, as I wondered if I was doing exactly right by the daughter of my old friend, but I would ease it by saying: "Pshaw! what made him bring her up in that manner?"

One day Gerald came to my library, asking the hand of my ward in marriage. He said she had refused him twice, but he could not give her up. I promised to do all I could for him, and went to bed, resolving to speak to Muriel about it.

The next morning, at the breakfast table, Jack said: "Have you heard the news?" Of course we were all anxious to hear it, and he continued:

"Old Mrs. Raynor's son was run over last night and nearly killed. He is not dead yet, but cannot last long; and I heard they had hardly a mouthful to eat."

We were all expressing sympathy and regret, when Muriel said, with that shrug of the shoulders I hated so:

"Oh, do not talk about such horrid things; they cannot hear you expressing your sympathy, and they would not appreciate it if they did; that kind of people never does."

I looked at her in amazement. What kind of a woman was she to talk so heartlessly of her fellow creatures? The talk drifted in other channels, and as we rose from the table, I said:

"May I see you in the library in the course of an hour, Miss Marsden?"

She looked at me in surprise, and then said indifferently:

"If you wish it."

I went to the library, and sat thinking what a beautiful woman she was, but how heartless and cruel. How I wished I could marry her off. My thoughts were interrupted by the frou-frou of skirts, a tap at the door, and she stood before me, looking as haughtily at me as a queen might look on her lowliest subject.

"You wish to see me?"

"Yes; be seated."

"I prefer to stand."

"Very well—Mr. Hastings last night asked your hand in marriage."

At the mention of his name a look of disdain came on her face, as she said:

"And so he has appealed to you, has he? What did you tell him?"

"Miss Marsden, as your guardian, I am bound to look after your welfare, to a certain extent. You can never find a better man than Gerald Hastings, or one more passionately in love with you; besides that, he is wealthy, handsome, has pleasing manners, and I wish you to marry him."

"You wish me to marry him! I would not marry him, for that reason alone, even if I loved him—but I detest him, therefore shall not marry him."

She gathered her skirts in one little jewelled hand and prepared to leave the room.

"Stop! I wish you to remain here and think this matter over carefully."

"Sorry to displease you, but I have an engagement; and besides, I never think; it is too tiresome." Bowing gaily, she tripped down the hall, whistling: "Good-bye, my lover, good-bye!"

I smothered an oath. So that was the way I was to be treated, in my own house, by a chit of a girl. I should never stand it. Walking to the window, I saw her on the lawn, engaged in a skirmish with Jack, over a book. At last, she threw it at him, and turning, ran into the house. Such antics were disgusting to me, and I determined to find Mehitable, and have a talk with her about it.

I entered the dining-room, and at first thought it was empty, but a second glance revealed a little figure, curled up in an easy-chair, before the fire, which we always kept lighted in the autumn, reading. It was Muriel. Jack came in after me, and, approaching Muriel, said:

"I say, Muriel, I am awfully sorry, but I have got to go to Harsgreen to-morrow, and we cannot have our ride."

"I am sorry, too, Jack; as, in that case, I shall have to ride alone."

"What horse will you take?"

"Black Beauty."

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"But, Muriel, I hate to have you take her when you go alone; she is dangerous."

"Oh, I can manage her. I shall not ride any other."

"Then you cannot go," said I.

"Indeed, and why not."

"Because Black Beauty is no fit horse for you, and I do not want you to take her."

"Well, I intend to go, and I shall ride Black Beauty, so what are you going to do about it? Come, Jack, I am going for a walk," and, taking her hat, she left the room, followed by Jack, while I proceeded to the stables, and ordered John on no account to saddle Black Beauty the following day, and then went to the house to do some writing.

As the dinner bell rang, Jack came in alone, saying Muriel had grown tired of him, and sent him back, while she finished her walk alone. I straightway dismissed her from my mind, as an unpleasant subject. My writing finished, about six o'clock I started to the post-office. As I neared the cottage of Mrs. Raynor, I thought of the poor woman and her son, and reproaching myself for not helping them, resolved to stop and see them on my way home. Suddenly the door was opened, and I heard a voice I knew only too well:

"Oh, that is all right, Mrs. Raynor, I am glad to help you. I will see that he has a more comfortable bed, and to-morrow will come again."

Could I believe my eyes? There stood Muriel, in all her bright beauty, and beside her Mrs. Raynor, thanking her, in a broken voice, for what she had done. They did not see me on account of the dusk, but as I walked on, my mind was in a very disturbed state. Was this the woman I had called heartless? Bah! It was only a new freak of hers, this trying to play "Lady Bountiful." I was detained at the post-office, therefore it was too late to stop at Mrs. Raynor's on my way back. As I neared my own door, I met Gerald Hastings, coming down the steps, with bag in hand.

"Good-bye, Mr. Craig," he said, offering his hand; "I have seen Muriel again, and it is all up with me."

"Why, Gerald, are you going?"

"Yes, but I thank you for what you have done for me. I cannot talk now, but will write you. Good-bye!"

Morning dawned, bright and clear, and as Muriel was not down to breakfast, I did not see my ward, but as I was sitting in the library, I heard the clatter of hoofs down the drive, and Muriel, radiantly beautiful, in her dark habit, mounted on Black Beauty, dashed past the window, and was out of sight before I could recover from my amazement. I called John, and wrathfully demanded what that meant.

"I could not help it, Mr. Willis," said the old man. "Miss Muriel ordered me to saddle the horse, and when I told her what you said, she went to work and saddled him herself, and I could not help it, sir, she would not stop."

"That will do."

No more writing for me now. I went out on the verandah and sat down. So my commands were to be regarded as lightly as air, and she was to go on hearing no master, but following the inclination of her own sweet will. My musings were interrupted by the appearance of little Susie Fielding, the daughter of an old shoemaker, who barely did enough work to keep the wolf from the door.

"Mr. Craig," she said, shyly, "is Miss Marsden in?"

"No, she is not. Anything I can do for you, Susie?"

"No, sir; she told me to come to-day and get my books."

"What books?"

"Oh, don't you know? She promised to get me some books and a dress, so I can go to school."

"When did she tell you this?"

"The last time she came to sing to father."

"Does she sing to your father?"

"Oh, yes, since his eyes got so bad he cannot read, Miss Marsden sings for him every day! Oh, sir, she is a perfect angel! We all love her—don't you?"

I evaded the embarrassing question, and asked:

"What else has this angel of yours been doing?"

"Oh, sir, she does everything! She bought a nice map for the school-house, and a chair for lame Willie Sanson, and she paid Mrs. Hammond's doctor's bill, and lots of other things, and everybody loves her. If I come to-night, do you suppose she will have my books?"

"I daresay."

"All right, I will come."

Surprise upon surprise, where would it end? And so this mischievous little flirt, whom I had termed heartless and cruel, and whom I had hated with all my heart, was really a good fairy, going round and helping the poor of the place in which I had lived all my life without even once realising their desolate condition. But why was she so wilful and haughty, always treating me with such supreme contempt? And then the thought arose, if I had been a little more gracious that first night, perhaps all would have been different. But her wild trick of the morning, I could not readily forgive that. What was that coming slowly up the hill? Farmer Brown in his waggon, with Black Beauty tied behind. Two steps took me to the gate, and, as he drew nearer, I saw Muriel lying on a feather bed in the bottom of the waggon. My heart gave a great leap, she looked so white and still. Was she dead? Just then, Farmer Brown, seeing me, called out:

"Mr. Craig! The little one got thrown, and wife said I had better bring her home, as you are nigher a doctor than we are."

"Where is she hurt?"

"Sprained her foot, I think. Now, if you'll help me, we'll get her in."

We carried her in and laid her on the sofa, while I summoned Mehitable to stay with her, and started for a doctor. Dr. Agnew came, and after cutting off the dainty French boot and examining her foot, he pronounced it a severe sprain, one that was liable to keep her in her room for weeks. And so wilful Muriel was punished, and I had no hand in it.

Two weeks had passed and I had not yet seen her, but Jack and Mehitable brought me favourable news of the invalid, and I never saw one of the villagers, but what her praises were rung in my ears, until I began to feel heartily ashamed of myself for acting as I had.

One morning I had gone to her door, but Mehitable brought me word that Muriel did not want to see me. After that I had not troubled her, until one day the doctor said Jack might carry her downstairs. Mehitable said she was wild with delight at the prospect of once again leaving her room. But, as luck would have it, Jack was called away on business, and, with great misgivings, I walked up to Muriel's room and knocked at the door. As she said "Come in," I entered. When she saw me, that look of dislike, I knew so well, crossed her face and she said:

"Oh, is it you?" and went on with the book she was reading. I walked to the sofa.

"Muriel, why did you not tell me?"

"Tell you what?"

"Tell me of the part you were playing as good fairy to our villagers."

"Why should I tell you anything? You took no interest in me or any of my doings."

"Muriel, forgive me! I confess I did wrong, but, little ward, I will explain it some time. Let bygones be bygones; shake hands and say we are friends."

Her little hand was laid in mine, and her brown eyes, full of unshed tears, looked gratefully at me, as she said:

"If you wish it."

"That will do," said I. "Now we are firm friends."

She laughed the wicked little laugh of old.

"You are strangely forgetting the duty of a friend; you have not even asked how I am feeling this bright morning."

"I know you are feeling well enough to go downstairs, and, as Jack is not here, I come to take his place, if you will trust yourself to me."

She looked at me from under her half-closed lids, saying slyly:

"Cruel guardians sometimes get rid of naughty wards by throwing them from their castle window when all attempts to marry them off have proved unsuccessful."

"Now, Muriel, I thought we were to forget the past."

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"So we are, and to show you how completely I forget it, I will let you carry me down."

As I lifted the slender figure and gazed at her pale face, resting so confidently on my shoulder, an indefinable something stole over me, and I could not explain my feelings, so I carefully descended to the sitting-room, where we surprised Mehitable, who sat by the window, sewing. Muriel laughed as she saw Mehitable look at us in wonderment.

"Do not look as though you thought the heavens were about to fall about your ears, aunty. This stupid old guardian of mine has come to his senses; we have buried the hatchet."

After that Muriel and I were the best of friends. Every day I carried her to the sofa in the sitting-room, and every day I sat by her side, and read or listened while she talked of her dear papa. And, as time wore on, I grew more ill at ease, as I thought that Jack loved her, and she only looked on me as an elder brother. At last I could bear it no longer, and, one morning, as Jack and I were alone, I said:

"Jack, do you love Muriel?"

"Well, yes; who could be in the house with her and not love her?"

A great lump rose in my throat, and I thought what an old fool I was to fall so desperately in love with my ward.

"Does she know this?"

"Know what?"

"Of your love for her?"

He turned and looked at me, and then said:

"Oh, that is what you mean, is it? Well, see here, this is the girl I love in that way," and he drew from his pocket the photograph of a dark, gipsy-faced girl. How light my heart felt as I looked at that photograph, and how I blessed that little dark-haired beauty for stealing Jack's heart before he saw Muriel.

"But does she not love you?"

"She? No, she knows all about Bessie. Now, you old goose," Jack said, assuming a paternal manner, "don't you suppose I know how matters are going? Go ahead and win, my son, and I will give you my blessing."

So that settled it. All day I felt as though treading on air. But I could not make up my mind to see Muriel until next day. As I entered the sitting-room, bearing a big bunch of red roses, which I laid on the sofa by her, she said:

"Why have you not been to see me before? Just think, Jack had to carry me downstairs this morning, you truant."

"Well, I will try to make myself very entertaining. Now I have come to tell you a story."

"To tell me a story? All right, I am all attention."

I sat down by her and commenced:

"Once on a time, as the story-books have it, there was a cross old bachelor, who had travelled a great deal, and seen enough of women to thoroughly disgust him. One day, when he received a letter announcing the death of an old friend, he felt very sorry; but when he read further, and found that this friend had appointed him guardian to his daughter, his anger knew no bounds, and, like the unreasonable man he was, he made up his mind to dislike the poor little daughter, and make it as unpleasant for her as possible. The evening of her arrival he travelled in the same train and overheard a conversation between her and another lady that only increased his dislike.

"As time wore on, he felt harder than ever towards her, and, while sitting on the verandah one day, wondering how to punish her, he learnt from a little girl how kind she had been to the poor, doing all sorts of good deeds, and he saw she had only used that heartless tone and manner as a cloak to cover her good deeds. And as he was thinking of her, she was brought home, and he found his ward had been injured. Well, they grew firmer friends from day to day, but he wished to be something more than a friend to her, so deeply did he love her. He went to her and told her all about it. Can you tell me how she felt?"

I waited a moment for an answer, and then the little hand was slipped in mine, and the happiest moment of my life was when Muriel's brown eyes looked in mine, and her dear voice murmured: "I love you."

Duncan Rivers.

Your Attention, Please.

I HAVE a few words of good advice for you, and will claim your attention for a few moments. This is what I want to say to you especially — don't delay in starting to read "Phantom Shadows," the excellent new serial story that has just begun in this paper. You can commence it this week, for the summary will give you the gist of the first instalment. After you have read to the end of chapter six, which concludes this week's instalment, I am certain that you will look forward to the time when the next *S. S.* will be published, so that you will be able to continue with the story. Really, Mr. Arnold Bennett's best work is contained in "Phantom Shadows," which is going to prove one of the most successful of *S.S.* serials. Just drop me a line on a post-card criticising it, will you, for I should be very glad to hear what my readers themselves think of it?

Do You Want £10?

WHEN you have read "Phantom Shadows," turn to page 459, and learn all about the competition, full details of which are given. Cannot you decipher the signatures? Perhaps not at first glance, but you may be able to after a careful study. At any rate it will be worth your while to do your best to solve them. The four back numbers of this paper containing the previous sets can still be obtained, so if you wish to enter the competition, you will find no difficulty on that score, for any newsagent will only be too glad to procure them for you, if he has not got them in stock, and they will be sent post free from this office on receipt of sixpence in stamps. The concluding set of signatures will appear next week.

A Chance for Small Advertisers.

THERE is an announcement on page 468 that will doubtless interest many readers. If you have something on your hands that you wish to dispose of, or have any small wants of any sort, you now have a unique opportunity of gratifying your wishes. Full particulars are given in the announcement referred to above.

Next Week's Number.

OUR next number will contain, besides the usual features, another splendid long instalment of "Phantom Shadows," and the Eleventh Unsolved Love Problem, entitled "Brian Cresswell's Choice." A prize of one guinea will be offered in connection with this latter.

I shall also announce next week the winner of the guinea offered in connection with the problem, "The Heart of Claire Gilchrist."

Your Editor.

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- An - Imaginary Wedding.

Telling What Happened in Consequence of a Girl's Foolish Fancy.

MISS FAINE looked dreamily out on the housetops of the crowded city and bit the corner of a heavy white envelope in her hand. It contained an invitation to the wedding of an old schoolfriend—the last of her class to marry, save herself—and she was thinking of the letter she had received from the merry little bride to be, a letter so full of happiness and anticipation. She thought, too, of Marian, her particular chum, who had married last Spring, and of how happy she was. Miss Faine had never been in love; she had never had a sweetheart, and so she thought less of the sentiment of love than of the satisfaction of not being an old maid or the fun of telling one's friends about one's wedding and of the delight of preparing a trousseau.

With characteristic impulsiveness and firmness and a bright smile of merriment, she decided to experience all the pleasure of anticipating and preparing for a wedding. She would get the prettiest trousseau imaginable and tell her friends—this much she would enjoy even if the groom was wanting. To that individual she gave but a passing thought; she should think of a name for him and when she talked of him at all it would be as of someone far away but possessed of all the manly traits she could think of. She resolved to begin the frolic by writing to Marian a confidential letter, telling her all about it and asking forgiveness for laughing at her foolish happiness the Spring before; then half the fun would be in telling Dr. Barnes, the cold man of the world who wanted her to marry him; the dressmaker, a gossipy little woman, would have to know, and the affair might be vaguely but cunningly hinted at in the boarding-house.

Miss Faine was a good-looking, graceful young woman of twenty-two. She dressed well, talked well, and, though considered indifferent and formal, was accorded considerable attention by reason of her being Society editress of the *Daily Telephone*.

She was exceedingly clever and tactful in business, but, though men liked and admired her, she was too smart to be flattered and too busy to devote to the men she met enough time to show her real character; so few had loved her. She had always been busy, successful, and ambitious, and cared little for men in general.

She had seldom thought of marriage until this morning, when she received the wedding invitation; then the monotony and emptiness of her life impressed her.

That night Miss Faine braided her long hair thoughtfully and lay down on her little white bed, not to sleep, but to think—as happy as a little child. She planned what she should say to Marian; then she could see herself downstairs in the drawing-room next evening when Dr. Barnes called—she should lean on the mantel with a deliciously indifferent air and tell him that she had promised to marry another—oh, the delight of that! Then she grew weary of thinking of the long list of friends to whom she should tell the secret as a profound one, and she fell asleep with thoughts of linen and lace and love floating through a mind usually filled with sterner things. In her dreams she heard the good-natured landlady gossiping to the new arrivals: "Now don't say I told you, but they say Miss Faine is engaged."

She left the house early next morning and stopped at the dressmaker's. Her face was quite pink when she said:

"Mrs. Martin, I want to see you about some sewing. I shall need rather more than I have needed. You know—about—that is, in February."

"Oh, Miss Edith, now are you goin' to be married? Well, now you can't think how glad I am. A sweet, pretty girl like you, without no mother, why, it's the very thing."

And she spent an hour planning and talking with Mrs. Martin.

By the time she reached her desk she had become so enchanted with the idea of her own wedding that she could think of nothing else. The society column that day would be short, for she must write to Marian.

"My dearest Marian," she began, "I am going to tell you a very important secret which must be carefully guarded. I am going to be married in February to Mr.——"

Here she lifted her pen and looked thoughtfully over the head of the editor-in-chief. Of course she must determine "his" name, occupation, and so on, though she had not given those things a thought. She took a scrap of paper and wrote "Mr. Ernest Field," but that did not please her, and she tried one after another until she decided on "Mr. Richard Blake." Then she continued:

"——Richard Blake, and he is, I think, all a man should be. He is kind, sympathetic and tenderhearted, besides being firm and manly."

She read this over and, without observing its inconsistency, liked it. Then added:

"He is literary in his tastes and appreciates the ability I may have in this direction."

Miss Faine was delighted with Mr. Richard Blake, and as she wrote the last sentence she thought of reckless, aristocratic Tom Arnold, to whom, it had been said, she was engaged, and of how he had scorned the idea of her taking a position on the *Daily Telephone*. She was conscious of liking her imaginary bridegroom infinitely more, and resumed:

"Without being strikingly handsome, he is good-looking, with strong, clear features and an expression of firmness about the mouth. I dare say, dear Marian, that all this seems very unlike my practical, unsentimental self, but I confess a complete change has come over me. We are planning to keep house, and all my aspirations, ambitions, hopes, and longings centre round the thought of that little home. And just think how I used to detest the idea of ever having to keep house!"

Then she wrote page after page concerning the pretty things she expected to have and asking Marian's advice.

When she posted that letter she thought she had never remembered feeling so happy. She pictured Marian with her pretty face full of smiling surprise, wondered if she would tell Fred, and then counted the hours until her answer should come.

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Walking home, she tried to recall the qualities she had attributed to Mr. Richard Blake, and she smiled as she said to herself: "I shall be sure to forget what he is like. I should have kept a copy of that description."

That evening she put on a daintily frilled and flowered dress and went downstairs to see Dr. Barnes. Afterwards she laughed outright at her own cleverness in acting the part so prettily, and she enjoyed it all so thoroughly that once or twice, after she had gone to her room, she wished she might share the joke with someone; but she had no intimate friends and she was one who lived so much alone that she seldom betrayed her innermost thoughts and feelings, even to her best friends.

Dr. Barnes had folded his arms and said quietly, looking her straight in the eyes:

"May I ask whom you are to marry?"

"Mr. Richard Blake," she had answered, naturally enough and with an appropriate downward look. She had feared he would ask other questions, and she was not quite prepared to give definite information concerning Mr. Blake, for he was very shadowy in her mind as yet. But Dr. Barnes was too conventional, too stiff to show any decided feeling concerning the information, and it did not occur to her that he really cared; perhaps he did not.

Little by little the news of the engagement of Miss Faine spread among her acquaintances, and she heard it hinted at in the boarding-house, at the office, and in Society.

She tacitly admitted it to some, smiled indifferently at others, and occasionally she flatly denied it. But always she enjoyed it fully and was glad to have been spared the pains of talking much about Mr. Blake. The few times she had had occasion to discuss him she had got a little mixed, and he never assumed a very definite shape in her mind. When she got her cheque from the office on Saturday she spent its contents in pretty accessories to her "trousseau," all of which were carefully put away and looked at and admired very often. She economised and planned for the wedding until the whole thing had got to seem a reality, and she would not have given up the dream for all the newspaper fame in the world.

Miss Faine buttoned her dark blue jacket closely across her chest and went into the street. She looked at her watch and found that she had just time to dress, after getting home, before it was time to go to the hotel where she was to dine with Marian and Fred. They had come to London for a day or two, and Marian had written that she would expect her. She took out her note and read:

"We have a great surprise for you—something you would never suspect, and I want you to look your very prettiest."

For the first time Edith began to be concerned as to the denouement of the little drama she had been playing. The trousseau was almost ready, the secret was well circulated among her acquaintances, and February was almost here. True, she had enjoyed it all—even more than she realised—but she was puzzled over how to end it.

She thought of telling her friends that it was only a joke concocted by herself—certainly it was innocent enough—but at once she knew that would not do. Her dignity, her love of truth, her reputation for veracity would suffer. She could not do that. She might say that Mr. Richard Blake had died suddenly, but that would only complicate matters. She might pretend a great many things, but she could not pretend to mourn. She almost dreaded to see Marian, for she felt quite guilty.

"If you two think you can fool me, you are mistaken, though I confess you act well."

An hour later, when she arrived at the hotel, she found Marian talking animatedly to a strange gentleman in the lofty hotel parlour. Another minute and there were kisses, embraces, and exclamations, and the man in the case sat silently by, unnoticed for a moment. Miss Faine recovered herself and looked at Marian for an introduction; the gentleman rose and also looked expectantly at Mrs. Fred Howard. That little lady looked at both, then laughed, and as she retreated, said:

"Now, if you two think you can fool me you are mistaken, though I confess you both act well. I am going to find Fred."

They were quite alone and both were embarrassed, Miss Faine most.

"Mrs. Howard evidently thinks we know each other," he began. "I am sure I don't know why she should. I am Mr. Blake, and you are——"

"Miss Faine," she answered, with a deep blush and a glowing smile.

He was mystified over the blush at the mention of his name as well as over the

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knowing smile—in fact, at the whole thing. She fairly dropped into a chair and said:

"Will you be kind enough to tell me your first name?"

He took a card from his pocket and handed it to her, regarding her quizzically. She held it between thumb and finger and read it a dozen times before she looked up. Then she handed it to him and said hurriedly:

"It's all a joke, Mr. Blake—a very practical and unfortunate joke. For Heaven's sake don't let Marian and Fred know—just let them think you know me, and at the first opportunity I'll explain everything, and you will see that it is a very serious joke. Miss Faine—don't forget my name, Edith Faine. Accept whatever may be said and don't be surprised at anything. I promise to straighten it all out afterwards. Marian is coming." Then, with an appealing look: "Please help me out."

What Mr. Richard Blake thought it would be difficult to say, but what he did was to appear perfectly at ease when Mr. and Mrs. Howard entered, and to admire Miss Faine extravagantly.

"Well, Miss Faine, how are you?" was Mr. Howard's greeting as he shook her hand and noticed the flushed face. Then, placing his hand affectionately on Mr. Blake's shoulder, he continued:

"Just to think, Marian has known about this for ever so long and never told me until a week ago. Dick and I have travelled the same territory for five years, and when I found out how it was, why, I just pretended ignorance and persuaded him to stay a day with Marian and me. Dick, I want you to understand that I knew it all, if you did keep as mum as an oyster. Miss Edith, do you know he has never told me a word about it?"

Miss Faine, in confusion, turned to Marian with some pleasantry, feeling that she would rather be anywhere else in the world than where she was.

"So you have suddenly grown very wise, have you, old man?" said Mr. Blake for the want of something else to say.

Marian was asked to sing; afterwards dinner was served and the time passed quickly. Marian and Fred were bright and talkative, feeling that they had surprised and pleased their guests. Miss Faine was perfectly miserable, but was intensely gratified at the cleverness Mr. Blake showed at every turn, and often when she was at an utter loss.

That gentleman, however, was never so puzzled in his life, and he watched every action, every expression, every remark on the part of the three companions to solve the mystery if possible. Once he thought the joke must be at the expense of Miss Faine, then some remark from her would make him believe that she was the perpetrator of a joke on Mr. and Mrs. Howard, and again he would decide that the whole thing, whatever it was, was concocted for his confusion; then he would console himself with the thought that at least he was partially alive to the situation, and occasional approving glances from Miss Faine told him he was successfully playing the part she had assigned him.

It was barely eight o'clock when Miss Faine pleaded an important engagement and stood ready to leave her friends at the hotel. Mr. Blake, hat in hand, was at her side, and Edith joined him in thanking Mr. and Mrs. Howard for a pleasant evening.

Edith Faine had never felt so wretched and embarrassed as when she found herself alone with Richard Blake. She wanted to speak, to tell him everything, to ask him what she should do, for she felt full of gratitude to him for having steered her safely through that miserable dinner. She was silent, and, noticing her embarrassment, he talked of commonplace things as they walked towards her boarding-place. He had seldom visited London, he was saying, and had but few acquaintances there. Howard, he thought, was a clever fellow, and when he had urged him to stay a day with him and Mrs. Howard he could not refuse; he had no idea of making so pleasant an acquaintance, and wouldn't she tell him all about the little joke and what he had to do with it. Whatever that was, he was innocent of it all and he hoped she would not feel otherwise than kindly towards him.

Where should she begin? How was she ever to make him, an utter stranger, understand the foolish caprice that had led her to this horrid deception? And what would he think of her when he knew all? All these things and more passed through her mind as she walked at his side, silent and miserable, and she wished she might go away forever from everyone she knew. For the first time since they left the hotel she spoke, frankly and quietly:

"Mr. Blake, it is all my fault, and I am sure if you only could know how wretched I am over it you would forgive me. It is most singular that your name should be Richard Blake—there's where the whole trouble came in."

Miss Faine said this seriously enough, but in spite of the solemnity of her tone and expression Richard Blake could not repress a smile. If that was really the "whole trouble" the case was hopeless, for he could think of no convenient way to change his name. He was wishing the "whole trouble" was in her name—that might be easily changed.

"You see," she began again, looking into his face, "I had no idea there was anyone in the whole world named Richard Blake—I just selected that name because I liked it, and if I had chosen any other everything would have been all right."

Still Mr. Blake was not enlightened, and though he was impatient for the facts he was amused and interested at her pretty confusion. Soon they had reached the door of her home and she invited him into the drawing-room, where he was to wait until she removed her hat. She went upstairs and bathed her burning cheeks, and, standing before her mirror, looked into her own face in questioning dismay. She did not know that at that very moment downstairs in the drawing-room, Dr. Barnes was introducing himself to Mr. Richard Blake! When she went into the room a few minutes later she felt like running away as fast as she could. Was this dreadful mistake to haunt her at every turn? This was certainly decidedly awkward, and she was greatly relieved when Dr. Barnes said "Good evening," and left her once more alone with Mr. Blake.

"Mr. Blake," she said, taking a chair near him, "I never had a sweetheart, and about four months ago, when one of my girl friends married, I happened to think that it must be ever so nice to have a wedding—I mean to plan for it, to tell one's friends all about it, you know."

Mr. Blake listened intently and encouraged her to talk freely by an interested and sympathetic manner.

"I have just been interested in my work—that was all—and when I thought it would be nice to have a wedding I didn't think of the man at all. There was no man in particular to think of, you see, and so I just thought I would select a name for him and that he would play a very unimportant part." She was beginning to feel more at ease now and laughed a low laugh as she leant back in her chair and said:

"I see now that he is a very important feature of a wedding."

He was glad of an opportunity to laugh, without seeming to ridicule, so he joined her heartily.

"So you were planning to have a wedding without a groom?"

"No," she explained. "I didn't see the end of it all—I was just enjoying the fun of telling some of my friends, I did not once think of an ending for the affair until I received the note from Marian this morning. Then I began to wonder what I should say when the wedding day arrived and there was no wedding. I did think of killing you—think of that! That was the only thing that had suggested itself to me, to say that Mr. Richard Blake had suddenly died; but imagine my feelings when I read your name on that card! Until then I had not thought of there being a real Mr. Richard Blake, and I knew then that you had to live!"

Both laughed heartily at this, and Edith was almost enjoying it.

"You see, I told Marian first of all," she continued, "and when she told Fred, why of course he thought you were the man. It is terrible that my own little joke should have turned out so disagreeably," and Miss Faine grew serious again. "Now I haven't any idea what to do. Do you think it best for

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me to say to Marian and Fred and the rest of them that I manufactured the whole story? Why, they would hardly believe it, would they?"

Mr. Blake did not think they would and said as much as he regarded the pattern of the carpet. He was thinking.

Richard Blake was a man who had seen and felt much; he knew the world and had lived in it. In the girl before him and the story she was telling he was learning something that was a revelation to him. He was learning that a bright young woman, attractive and gentle, as he could plainly discern, could live in the same world that he knew, mix with the passing throng, and yet be something apart from it and have little in common with it. He knew Society girls who flirted and danced and gossipped, but he had never known one who had so much imagination, determination and spirit of caprice combined with the good sense this young lady evidently possessed.

He thought he understood her—understood the motives and the childish dreams that prompted this odd little romance of hers. But he was at as great a loss as she as to what was best to be done now that things had taken so unexpected a turn.

He could see that the whole thing was very romantic and that the most romantic thing he could do would be to propose to her. Such a possibility would have occurred to most girls, but it had never suggested itself to Miss Faine. She looked at him with perfect confidence in his ability to help and vaguely wondered what he would say.

"Well," he said, after a pause, "it is rather a peculiar combination of circumstances, and I wish I knew how to release you from this self-woven net. I don't even know what to suggest." And Richard Blake bit his lip thoughtfully. "Of course it would make a nice ending to the story if we could be married in February, but that would hardly do, for we don't even know each other."

She answered quickly and without embarrassment.

"No, no, that wouldn't do at all."

And after a moment she added, "Certainly not," with a toss of her head and a firmness that she had not exhibited before.

Mr. Blake wondered a little at her decided disapproval of a suggestion that would not have been considered bad by some girls he knew, and perhaps his vanity was a trifle wounded.

There was silence for some seconds, and it was he who spoke first.

"I am not engaged, I haven't any sweetheart, and I am not considered such a bad fellow—suppose we let things stand as they are. It won't hurt you to let your friends think you are engaged to me, and I am sure I shall feel honoured. I am going away, you know, and we shall probably not meet again. In the course of time you will love and marry someone, and then you can fix up some story about this that will sound all right—say we didn't agree, or that you found someone else you liked better."

She was thoughtful a moment, then her face brightened gradually as she said:

"Will that inconvenience you at all? I don't think you will be likely to meet anyone who has heard of it—you just happened to know Fred Howard—I can just say we decided to put the wedding off for a year, or something like that."

And so it was decided. Richard Blake left the presence of Miss Faine that night in a very peculiar frame of mind. He was practically an engaged man, and the woman was one whom he had never seen before. He laughed at the situation and planned to have Miss Faine and Mr. and Mrs. Howard to dine with him next afternoon.

Some say Miss Faine is fickle; others say they never believed the story, and those who know her best contend that she may give up her ambition for Richard Blake, but they doubt it.

Mr. Blake himself is wondering if she would.

Ida Gallagher.

A CASE FOR REFORMATION.

Telling of a Rule that Worked Both Ways.

Mr. and Mrs. Josiah Greenleaf Hamilton were enjoying their first breakfast in their mutual home. The honeymoon was over, the hotel meals and the *table d'hôte* dinners would be enjoyed no more. Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton were "at home," not only in the sense in which society understands the term, but literally. Mrs. Hamilton realised the fact with a slight feeling of apprehension, Mr. Hamilton with a sense akin to joy. To him the honeymoon trip had been a useless expenditure of good money and valuable time. To her it had been the main thing, after the trousseau, that had reconciled her to matrimony.

Mr. Hamilton drew off the glasses with which he had been reading the paper, and put on his other spectacles in order to better look at his wife on the other side of the table. She presented a pretty sight, with her fluffy hair. Her breakfast jacket was of pink cashmere, so cunningly disguised with wandering embroideries and foams of lace that one could scarcely tell of what the foundation for all this ornamentation consisted. Her skirt was nothing more or less than an extremely frivolous petticoat of pink silk and beading, with countless numbers of useless little bow-knots in pretty ribbon, and the foot that was outstretched on the hassock under the table was ensconced in a *chic*, high-heeled slipper.

Mr. Hamilton mused upon his ideal of a wife and housekeeper. It was an ideal founded upon recollections of his own mother, who lived in the days when one good dress a year sufficed any woman, and who died while her son was still so young that her memory had become a sacred thing, undimmed by recent recollection. His mother, he remembered, always breakfasted in a severely plain frock, with her hair neatly disposed in a net, and round her neck a simple frill of white lace, fastened always with the same brooch, one containing the hair of her departed father. Would Lucille, wondered Mr. Josiah Greenleaf Hamilton, wear a lock of his hair in case he was called away before her?

"I fear not," he sighed to himself, "unless I beforehand thoroughly succeed in forming her mind."

Mr. Hamilton had never read "David Copperfield"—he considered novels unworthy the attention of a successful hide and leather merchant—but like the redoubtable David, he had married in the hope of forming the mind of the extremely giddy damsel whom he had selected for his helpmate. The

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law of attraction for one's opposite had led him to fall in love with Lucille, the other law that prevents many a man from letting well enough alone was urging him to begin the reformation right away.

"My dear," he said, in what he imagined was a firm and unyielding voice.

"Yes, Popsey," returned Lucille in the universally sweet tone she employed to everyone she considered worth speaking to, from the greengrocer to her dearest bosom friend.

Mr. Josiah Greenleaf Hamilton's brow became corrugated in a frown. "Popsey" was all very well as an endearment during the courting period, but it was quite inappropriate now. Perhaps it was too much to expect his wife to always refer to him as "Mr. Hamilton"—though such had been the habit of that ideal woman, his mother, but at least she might say "Josiah."

He began again:

"My dear, now that we are at home we ought to talk things over in a definite manner, and have our future course of action fully arranged."

"That's so, Pops," returned Lucille in the most cordial manner, at the same time filling a saucer with cream for Dodo, her fat pug, that was another of Mr. Hamilton's unmentioned grievances.

"You know, my dear, as married people, we shall find certain duties confronting us that perhaps never troubled us in our unwedded days," Mr. Hamilton continued. He was going to be very harsh with the pretty girl presently, but just now, in order to get to the point more easily, he was using the term "us" in order to tacitly class himself among those needing reformation.

"We are sure to, Pops," replied Lucille, with such amazing alacrity that her husband began to feel quite cheered, and his seemingly difficult task no trouble at all.

He considered where he would begin. Would it be best to tell her of his inborn objection to a useless pug dog, or to giddy morning gowns? Should he desire her to order a number of plain, sensible hats at once, or should he tell her that he considered "Popsey" a very improper form of salutation to be used by a wife of twenty to a husband of forty-four? Ought he to tell her that he wished her to belong to more charitable societies and fewer clubs for the appreciation of bridge whist, or might it not be as well to start at once on his pet grievance of all, her extravagance? To be sure, her wishes had never gone beyond his ability to gratify them, but he had not the slightest intention of living up to his income, and, in fact, had married in the hope of economising, and adding to his already respectable fortune.

The man who hesitates is supposed to be lost. Mr. Hamilton, at any rate, lost his chance to speak, for while he was ruminating, Lucille finished feeding the dog, and completed her idiotic proceeding by wiping Dodo's cream-bespattered jaw with her lace handkerchief. Then she came and perched herself on the arm of Josiah Greenleaf Hamilton's chair and said:

"Darling old Popsey, I'm so glad you've started on this subject, for it's one I've bothered my head about ever since I promised to love and honour you. There are such a lot of things in this household that need reformation."

So she saw it, too! Dear girl, she wasn't so frivolous.

"Now, Pops, there's no use beating about the bush, we might as well speak plainly, mightn't we, old boy?"

He was so gratified at the way in which she was playing up to him, that he quite overlooked the unreverential "old boy," and nodded benignly.

"So," she went on, "I'm going to say what I want to say, and after that you can do your speaking, dear. Now, first, this house. It's all wrong."

Mr. Hamilton gazed at the dusty chairs, the tables laden with articles wholly unsuited to a breakfast room—new slippers and parcels of goods sent home "on approval" were among them—and thought that the house indeed needed the attention and the ministering feather duster of a housekeeper such as his mother had been.

Mrs. Hamilton was continuing her remarks:

"And, Popsey, we'd better just tear out the whole inside and do it over. Those parcels over there are some sample chintzes and wall-paper, which I'm going to look at just as soon as you've gone to the city, leaving Dodo and me alone. And you needn't fear my taste, Pops, for I shall show every pattern to Dodo, and if he barks at them I'll not take them, for Dodo has darling taste—haven't you, old doggy-woggy? I thought I'd have this room pink. You know Clara Gibson? Well, she had her boudoir that way, and it was fine. Then we'll rip up all that faded, green, tarnished gold in the drawing-room, and have it in ivory and *café au lait*, with Louis Quinze chairs. As for your den, you positively must have a cosy corner in it done up in Japanese style, and then I'm going to make you learn to smoke cigarettes. They seem the only kind of smoke permissible in a cosy corner."

She paused to reflect, then went on.

"Then you know, dearie, your clothes aren't at all what they should be. That old tailor of yours isn't any class at all. You must give up wearing mutton-chop whiskers and ready-made neckties. Positively, dear, you'll never realise how your neckties made me suffer when you used to come a-wooing, and what I've gone through because of the way my sisters laughed at them. They guessed first that I—liked you, because Celia said I must be dead gone or I could never put up with such cravats. And your collars aren't right, either, and I wish you'd have more patent leather shoes. I saw a crack in those you wore at dinner last evening.

"And when you have had the house done up we must get some new servants and select a livery for them—something neat and showy, with red and yellow, is what I'd go in for, with white silk stockings on the men. And I have got to have a carriage of my own, if I'm to go out as much as I really think I ought to, in order to keep up our social standing. I ought to have some more diamonds, too. And, Popsey, there's just one thing more you must promise me. It's the most important of all. I've wanted to speak of it all through the honeymoon, and now we're going to run the house on a rational basis, with our friends coming in every other evening or so, I hope, to play a simple game of bridge, if nothing else. Popsey, I want you to promise to call me Lulu. Lucille is altogether too frumpy and aged for me, it doesn't suit my style any more than that horrible Josiah suits yours, Pops, and I'm sure I'd as soon call you Jehoshaphat as Josiah."

Mr. Josiah Greenleaf Hamilton has not, up to now, even started at the task of forming his wife's mind. He is too busy earning money to pay for her reforms in household decoration and trying to dodge her proposed reforms in his own ways and whiskers.

J. Cranford.

BUYING AND SELLING.

In response to many and oft-repeated requests, we have decided to throw our advertisement columns open to the small and the private advertiser. Many a bargain goes a-begging for want of a suitable medium for bringing buyer and seller into touch with one another, and we believe that *Short Stories*, with its colossal circulation, can do wonders in this respect. We shall, therefore, commence at once a miscellaneous advertisement column for the reception of genuine bargain announcements—wants, holiday apartments, exchanges, etc., at a uniform rate of 6d. per line of eight words, so that if you have something you want to sell quickly, and it's cheap, try a line in *Short Stories*, or, if you want to pick up a bargain, watch our miscellaneous column. All advertisements should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, *Short Stories*, 17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and should reach us not later than Friday of each week, when they will appear eleven days afterwards.

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PETITE'S PROPOSAL.

A Very Pretty Story, Relating how a Darling Little Girl was the Cause of Great Happiness.

An accident, or, rather, the crowd about an accident, which had just occurred at the street corner, prevented the handsome greys, drawing Miss Beatrice Bloom's brougham, from going a step farther.

James climbed down from the box, and came to the carriage door to explain the delay to his mistress.

"A man has been run over by a dray," he said. "They won't keep us long."

"Poor man; I am sorry! I will go into White's tea-shop while we are waiting," and Miss Beatrice Bloom, tall, stately, dignified, a handsome orphan, a charming heiress, a social favourite, left her carriage to enter the tempting confectioner's just at hand.

At two o'clock on this same December afternoon, Petite and Raspberry, in the lonely garret of a tenement, were holding a conversation; that is, Petite did the conversing, while Raspberry, being a doll, could only listen in bland, smiling silence.

"Oh, dear," said Petite at last, "we'll die, Waspberry, if papa don't tomed soon; den we'll go up to the sky wiv mamma. It's a very long time since he's been goned. Let's go, find him; he'll be so glad!" And popping on an old hat, like an extinguisher, over her fair curls, and catching Raspberry by her only arm, the little sprite hopped down the long flight of stairs, reached the pavement without encountering one of the tenement boys, who had twice called her "yellow top" in the one week that she and her father had tried to realise the small tenement garret as "home" for the present, then scampering round the corner and running straight ahead, for many streets, she found herself in the heart of the great city.

"I fought I could tomed," she said confidentially to Raspberry; and for the next two hours she feasted her blue eyes on the wonderful things in the shop windows. "This is a weal nice one, Waspberry," she said, holding up her doll so that she, too, could see the tempting pink and white confections in White's window. "See the little wound ones wiv the nuts on, and the awful good butter-tups, and the house wiv frost all on it."

She stopped, for some feathery flakes of snow were sifting from the sky upon her, and melting into dark spots upon the remnant of a raspberry satin gown, in which her doll was dressed.

"Oh, Waspberry," said Petite, shiveringly, "I wants my papa!" and, forgetting the charms of the window, she turned quickly to cross the street, when she ran into Miss Beatrice Bloom, about to enter the shop.

"You tiny little girl!" exclaimed Beatrice; "where are you going all alone?"

"To find papa," replied Petite, looking up to the young lady's face, with eyes deeply troubled.

"But you can't get across the street now," said Beatrice, delaying the child with her gloved hand; "there is such a crowd. Where is your papa?"

"I don't know," Petite answered, the trouble deepening in her eyes; "but I know he's somewheres; Waspberry and me is finding him."

"Where do you live?" questioned Beatrice, clasping the little girl's cold fingers firmly, impressed by Petite's lovely face and artless manner.

"I don't quite know," replied Petite, "but somewheres."

"And what is your name?" continued Beatrice, studying more closely the general appearance of the little waif, with as sober a face as she could command.

"Mine is Petite and hers is Waspberry. May I go now, please?" and she tried to draw her little hand away. "The peoples is almost goned now, and papa might never det founded, if Waspberry and me don't hurry awful much."

"Wait a moment, dear," said Beatrice, "and we will see if this man knows where your papa is," and she nodded to a passing policeman, who hastened to her.

"No, Miss Bloom," he said, at once recognising the young lady, "I don't know anything of the child or her father—these small ones get lost often, and when there's nobody to mind them, we just send them to one or another of the homes; but this one is uncommonly nice-looking; her friends'll turn up all right; just let her come along with me."

Petite clung tightly to Beatrice's fingers as the policeman spoke, but she scanned his face with round eyes, as tearless and unfrightened as her doll's.

"I'll take her with me," said Beatrice, with a sudden resolution. "I—I think I would like to keep her for a day or two, while you are searching for her friends."

"Just as you like, miss," he responded, and managing to learn from the little girl that papa was "papa," her doll "Waspberry," and her own name "Petite, of tourse," he made a note of this slender clue, and touched his hat as he put the little one into Beatrice's brougham, persuaded that the child was much better off than she had ever been before.

"Is we going to find papa?" asked Petite, as the carriage rolled away.

"The kind policeman is going to look everywhere for him while you go home with me," replied Beatrice gently.

"And may papa tomed, too, when he's founded?" questioned Petite.

"I expect he will be very anxious to come and get you," laughed Beatrice; and, Petite, apparently satisfied with the reply, climbed on to her knees, and held Raspberry to the carriage window, that she might not miss any of the street sights.

"Oh, Waspberry, look!" she exclaimed, as they whirled round a corner, "they is carrying a poor man, under a blanket, all hurted to def; isn't it too bad, Waspberry?"

"That is the poor man who was hurt at the corner,"

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explained Beatrice, watching every motion of her new charge; "they are taking him to a hospital."

"I wish papa didn't get losted," said Petite, tears gathering in her eyes for the first time that day. "What does papas get losted for?" and she sat down on the seat as if outside attractions were all gone.

"Perhaps it is the little girls that get lost," observed Beatrice, drawing the golden head nearer to her. "Do you think you'll like to stay with me?"

"Ye-e-s, please, when papa tomes, too," Petite replied, brushing the tears from her fair little face with her cold hands.

And "papa"? Alas, it was he who, penniless and sick at heart, had been knocked down and run over by a heavy dray, as he crossed the street that afternoon, and it was he, on his way to a hospital, whom Petite saw, when looking from the window of Beatrice's brougham.

* * * * *

Spring was approaching, and in spite of constant advertising and the conscientious efforts of Miss Bloom and the policeman, no one claimed Petite, and she, with Raspberry, fitted out with a new arm and raspberry satin gown, had become an unquestionable part of Beatrice's household.

Beatrice's friends had been not a little amused at this, "her latest fad," but one glimpse of the fair-haired, blue-eyed maiden, and an introduction to Raspberry, invariably resulted in a complete surrender to the beguiling little protegée.

"I really believe I should adopt the little fairy myself, if I had a chance," said Mrs. Ravenswood at one of Beatrice's afternoon teas.

"But she is not adopted, you know," said Mrs. Calton; "her friends are expected to claim her at any time."

"Petite," said Beatrice, one Saturday morning, looking across a mass of blossoms which were piled in a reckless heap upon the dining-table, "would you like to help me tie these flowers into bunches, and then go with me to leave them at the hospital, so that the poor patients can have them?"

Petite danced up and down in delighted assent, then laying Raspberry on a chair, busied her dainty fingers in tying wax-stemmed roses, deep-scented carnations, and fragrant violets into clusters, to be distributed at the hospital by her own wee self, and an hour later she was handing them here and there to the occupants of a long row of hospital cots.

"This is a sad case," said one of the nurses to Beatrice, as they stopped before the last cot in the row; "he was run over several months ago, and ever since has been lying here, his reason wandering, and seemingly without a friend. A few days ago he recovered his mind, but he is lame for life, and——"

Someone called the nurse away for a moment, and Beatrice found herself gazing at a white cot, on which lay, thin and worn, with closed eyes, he whom, five years ago, she had promised, with all her heart, to marry; then a quarrel came, followed by a rigid misunderstanding, and the last she had seen of Ralph Pattington in that bitter time was on the night he said: "Beatrice, this must be a final yes or no, for I shall never ask you again!" Knowing the quarrel to be of her making, the fault hers alone, and knowing she loved him and only him, she bade him go, and he sailed for America, married there, lost his wife, his fortune also. This much she had heard, the rest she did not know, but she saw him now, helpless, friendless; the bitterness in the past was all gone, and the old love, mellowed by sympathy and pity, brightened her eyes.

His angry farewell on that night, five years ago, had now her benediction, and yet he knew it not.

"Hush, dear," she said softly, taking a bunch of white carnations from Petite's hand, as the little girl hurried towards her, "he is asleep; we must not wake him. I will give him the flowers," and stooping over him, she laid the small posy where his eyes must see it when they opened.

"Poor man," said Petite, tip-toeing from his cot, without venturing a glance at him, so afraid was she of arousing him.

"I will send some fruit and jellies for the case you were telling me of," said Beatrice to the nurse, who had just returned to her, "and if there is anything else I can do, please let me know at once."

She spoke the last words with so much stress, that Petite looked up into her face questioningly as they left the nurse.

"You don't know it all, little golden-hair," said Beatrice, lifting Petite in her arms as if about to place her in the carriage, "but you have helped me to be patient with my trouble, and perhaps some time the trouble will all go away."

Petite's eyes were still upon her with a deeply puzzled expression as the carriage whirled them out of the hospital grounds.

"Twouble," said Petite at last, having caught this word in Beatrice's strange address; "yes, that is what peoples has when their papas is losted. Is your papa losted?"

A few days later, Ralph Pattington received a note from certain bankers in the City, telling him that a generous sum of money had been placed on deposit for his use in their bank.

A week later they received a note from Ralph Pattington, courteously declining the gift, and this note they forwarded to Beatrice.

She trembled as she read it, but kept it because of the handwriting. Had she known that kind Fate, in the shape of a lawyer, had hunted out Ralph Pattington, and presented him with a moderate fortune and estate, left him by an uncle, she would not have felt offended at the returned gift.

The uncle's fortune speeded Ralph's recovery, and, making a handsome restitution to the hospital for the attention and care he had received there, he began a vigorous search for lost Petite.

* * * * *

June came, and hastened people from town to the country.

"My agent has found a lovely place for us at Riverside," Beatrice told Mrs. Calton; "not fashionable, perhaps, but picturesque, high grounds extending to the river edge, and a good place for Petite."

"Ah!" observed Mrs. Calton, who was afraid Petite was being too much considered, and so determining to give Beatrice a bit of motherly advice. "Don't forget you are growing older, my dear, and that you ought to be with other young people. There may be none at all in this place, and to settle by a river, it—ah, sounds so wet!"

"I know," laughed Beatrice, "but then I am going just the same. You know, I never change my mind."

Riverside proved a beautiful spot for a summer holiday.

"Beatrice is growing quite gay in this quiet place," said Mrs. Calton, who accompanied her, to those that called,

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" and dear little Petite becoming a perfect gipsy under that big hat of hers." And then she would tell Petite's story.

Shut in by high, dense hedges, no one knew much of the place " next door," until Mrs. Calton learnt through the cook, who was told by the milkman, that a strange gentleman had come there to spend the summer, and opened the house for the first time in many years.

" I believe I saw him the other morning," added Mrs. Calton; " if so, he is quite lame."

Beatrice said nothing, but her heart beat faster, and her colour deepened at the word " lame." Then, taking herself to task for foolish fancies, she caught Petite by the hand and ran out into the garden.

Petite's blue eyes were upon her, and she seemed reflecting in a child's vague way.

" What are you thinking of, my Petite ? " asked Beatrice, catching her up, and carrying her to a bench near by.

" I want papa," said the child.

" What ! with Raspberry and me ? " questioned Beatrice.

" Yes," nodded Petite; " why don't he be founded ? Why is he losted ? "

Beatrice's face lengthened.

" Dear little one," she said, " I don't know why he isn't found, but I can't spare you, even if he is."

" But you said he might come, too, wiv Raspberry and me; don't you 'member ? "

Beatrice smiled.

" Den it will be so lovely," continued Petite. " I'm so tired this way."

" Ah ! dear little Petite, don't—please, don't ! " and the stately and dignified Miss Bloom leant her head on the child's soft neck and cried.

Instinct was trying to tell her whose little child this was, and who was living " next door," yet it seemed but preposterous fancy.

" Waspberry and me loves you awful," said Petite, trying to comfort Beatrice; " we just only want papa founded, too, that's all."

" Yes, dear," replied Beatrice more calmly; " now run and get your hat, and we will go boating for a little while."

The gentleman " next door," stepping out upon a balcony almost overhanging his neighbour's ground, saw and heard this little scene in a stupefaction of surprise, delight, and unbelief. It was the first time since occupying the house left him by his uncle that he had given his neighbours a thought. His mind was engrossed in what, until this wonderful moment, had been a fruitless search for his little daughter, Petite, and now behold her found, almost upon his threshold ! Or was he dreaming, or his mind adrift, as it had been during that long hospital illness ?

No ! thank Heaven ! he could say " No," for there, on the river, but a little distance away, he could see his little one in a boat, with Beatrice at the oars. And why Beatrice with his child in charge ? he asked himself, in deepest bewilderment; and, mopping a sudden perspiration from his face and hands, he seized his stick and hat, and, hastening to his boat-house, drew out the boat, and was on the water.

' Petite is careless; she leans too far over the side," he said to himself, as if excusing himself for his eager pursuit.

" Be careful, Petite, or you will fall in," cautioned Beatrice, her back turned to the boat that was coming nearer and nearer.

" Then when papa is founded I would be dwounded."

rhymed the little sprite, intending to draw back from the boat edge, but, instead, losing her balance and toppling in the water.

Beatrice's boat made a violent lurch as she reached out to catch the child.

" Wait, Beatrice ! " said a well-remembered voice near her, and Ralph Pattington, cool and reassuring in the face of danger, pulled his boat close to hers, and while she steadied it with her slender fingers, that it might not upset, he reached down into the water and grasped, and grasped, and grasped again, until he brought Petite to the surface.

" Let me take her," said Beatrice, holding out her arm for the unconscious child.

He obeyed; then clambering into Beatrice's boat, he set his own adrift, and rowed her quickly to land.

" To my house ? " he asked hurriedly.

" Mine, please; let it be mine," replied Beatrice, the colour surging to her pale, frightened face; and there together they fought death by drowning, and at length won.

Petite opened her blue eyes, and they rested on her father.

" Oh, papa ! " she gasped, with a little cry of delight they had never before heard, " you is founded, you is founded ! And I isn't dwounded, and you is to stay here wiv Waspberry and me."

" Am I, Beatrice ? " he asked involuntarily. " But I forget," he added quickly; " I said I was never to ask that question again. Petite must ask it for me when she is a little stronger."

And so it came to pass one August afternoon, when Beatrice, Petite, and her father were together, that Petite put her arms about Beatrice's neck, and said:

" Please will you let papa come and live wiv you always, and Waspberry and me, now he is founded ? "

" Yes," laughed Beatrice, in spite of the solemnity of the moment.

" Just wait till I tell Waspberry," said Petite, with a little caress, as she skipped off to find her doll.

" I understand now," said Ralph, taking a bunch of withered carnations from the pages of his pocket-book, " the message of forgiveness which these flowers brought me in the hospital. I am forgiven."

" I thought you had the forgiving to do," she said quietly.

M. C. Hyde.

" Doctor," she said archly, " some physicians say kissing isn't healthy. What do you think of it ? " " Well, really," replied the handsome young doctor, " I don't think you or I should attempt to decide that off-hand. Let's put our heads together and consider."

Freddie: "If after all that has been, Mabel, I should tell you that I found I did not love you as much as I love someone else, and that I could not marry you, would it be a great trial for you, dear ? " Mabel: " Yes, Freddie, dear. It would be a breach of promise trial."

" Yesterday was pa's birthday," said the young man's best girl, as they stood talking over the gate early in the evening. " Yes ? " he replied, absently. " What did you give him ? " " A pair of nice soft slippers. He is walking about the room in them now. You ought to see him." " I think I will. This might be a good time to ask him if I might have you."

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Arranged Matters.

"You are the world to me," he whispered. "All right," she answered; "you can be the sun. I'm going to marry your father."

Then He Wondered.

He: "Why, I never have any sense when I'm in the company of a pretty girl." She: "What a queer way of paying me a compliment, Mr. Sappy!"

Her Opinion.

Gladys: "He said he would die if I refused him." Ethel: "And still you refused him?" Gladys: "Oh, yes. I think he will live long enough to propose again."

As Women Do.

He: "I don't see how you can say such terrible things about another woman." She: "You don't understand, you silly. Why, Carrie is my dearest friend."

His Preference.

"Somehow or other I don't think I'd care to be the prettiest girl in the world," he remarked. She: "Why not?" He: "Because I'd rather be next to the prettiest."

Gave Vent to His Anger.

"Why are you crying, dear?" "Oh, mother, last night I showed Henry the seat on which we first courted. "What did he do?" "He went over and kicked it."

The Superiority of Women.

Ada: "Men are so slow! It took him nearly two hours to propose to me last night." Floss: "And how long did it take you to accept him, dear?" Ada: "Just two seconds."

The Height of Happiness.

Dorothy: "I do wish we were rich, father." Her father: "How rich would you like to be?" Dorothy: "Oh, awfully rich; rich enough to snub people and still be called agreeable."

In Times to Come.

The Hawk: "I have one great advantage over you. I don't need to keep dodging motor-cars all the time." The Cow: "No; but just wait till they get these airships going."

Repudiated the Offence.

Young Lady (in the music shop): "Have you 'Kissed Me in the Moonlight'?" Assistant: "No, miss; it wasn't me. It must have been the other assistant. I've only just come here."

Good Advice.

Mabel: "Do you think a girl should answer a young man's proposal by letter?" Tom: "Not one letter, but three." Mabel: "Three letters?" Tom: "Certainly. Y-e-s."

Of Course Not.

Wife: "George, the way you flirted with that red-headed girl in the shop was perfectly shameful!" Husband: "Well, my dear, as you have such a penchant for shopping, you must not be surprised if I have a counter-attraction!"

No Star-Gazer Needed.

He: "The astrologer described you exactly, and said that I would marry you." She: "What a waste of money! I could have told you the same thing myself if you had asked me."

A Biassed Arbitrator.

"The reason I can't get along with my wife is that she wants to submit all our differences to arbitration." "To arbitration?" "Yes. She always wants to refer disputes to her mother."

A Too Candid Friend.

Maude: "What is the quarrel between Alice and Kate?" Ethel: "Why, you see, Alice asked Kate to tell her just what she thought of her." Maude: "Yes?" Ethel: "Kate told her."

He Regretted Having Spoken.

He: "Before proposing, Miss Lulu, I wish to know if you have anything in the bank?" She: "Yes, Mr. Poorman, I I have a lover there. He is the cashier, and we are to be married next week."

He Had Done His Share.

He: "Mary, this milliner's bill is unusually large. I thought we had decided to be economical." She: "And we have been. Haven't you given up smoking and horse-racing and the club?"

A Reception.

Little Ethel (horrified): "We've invited too many children to our tea-party. There's only enough cake for them to have a tiny piece each." Little Dot (resignedly): "That's too bad. We'll have to call it a reception."

Of Course She Wouldn't.

Jack: "Miss Fay, will you marry me?" Miss Fay: "I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth." Jack: "Oh, I say—that's rather hard—I——" Miss Fay: "Goose! How could I? Who'd perform the ceremony?"

Choice of Two Evils.

Horrified Mother: "I just this minute saw Mr. Nicefello's arm round your waist. It's perfectly awful." Repentant daughter: "Y-e-s, mother, but it would be a good deal more awful to see his arm round some other girl's waist."

Insult to Injury.

"I'm tired of you laughing at my game," said the amateur golfer. "If I hear any more impudence from you I'll hit you over the head." "All right," replied the caddie, "but I'll bet you don't know what would be the right club to do it with."

What a Brute!

Clara: "Of all mean, selfish, worldly, despicable creatures I think Mr. Huggem is the worst." Dora: "Why, what has he done?" Clara: "When I refused him, he did not commit suicide, or do anything so rash at all. He got engaged to a girl I hate."

From the Frying-Pan Into the Fire.

Youth: "What is your father stamping about for?" Maiden: "I told him you wanted to marry me, and I'm afraid he's looking for his stick." Youth: "Phew! Go and tell him it's all a mistake, and I don't want to marry you." Maiden: "Horrors, no! Then he'd go like a shot for his gun."

He Sat Much Closer Then.

He was seated on the other side of the room. "Harry," she said, "if a fire were to break out suddenly in the house, what would be your first impulse, do you think?" "Well, my first thought would be for you, of course. I would get you to a place of safety, and then do what I could to extinguish the flames." "That would be very nice of you, Harry, to think of me first; but if a fire were to break out now, for instance, wouldn't you lose valuable time reaching me from right over there?"

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DEAF AND DUMB.

Telling the Consequences of a Deception.

"I've just dropped in for a few moments, Herbert," said young Edward Ogden, a fair-haired, handsome boy of about fourteen, entering the bachelor apartments of his cousin, Herbert Lawrence. "I'm on my way back to boarding-school, you know; I regret to say that it opens on the 1st of September. Mother instructed me to call here, and to remind you of that promised visit to Greenlawn Cottage."

"*Did* I promise, Edward, to pay her a visit? Oh, yes; I remember. It was last April, just before she left town, and I said 'upon my honour, I'd come,' and all that sort of thing." Here Mr. Lawrence mysteriously expressed his sense of how deeply the recollection of that promise affected him, by a nervous pull at his moustache. "When does she want me, Ned?"

"The first week in September, as you agreed, Herbert."

"I'm sorry, Ned; but I shall have to delay my visit till the 10th. I've positively engaged myself to join a shooting-party for the next few days. The 10th will be perfectly convenient to your mother, won't it?

"Perfectly, I expect. She only wishes you to keep your promise, some time during the month. My word!"—as Edward glanced at the clock over his cousin's mantel—"I'd no idea it was two o'clock, Herbert. I must hurry off, or I'm bound to miss the train."

"A moment more, Ned, if you please. Has your mother anyone staying with her at present? Any *young lady*, I mean?"

The boy laughed merrily.

"No, Herbert, or you may be sure, knowing your hatred for the species, that she wouldn't have asked you. Excepting herself and Mary Curtis, there's not a person at Greenlawn, male or female."

"Mary Curtis?" Herbert asked. "Who is she?"

"A young lady; but she hardly counts as one, poor thing. You've heard mother speak of her, haven't you? She's deaf and dumb."

"How charming she must be!" exclaimed Herbert, so seriously that his young cousin burst into a peal of laughter, long and loud. "I shall learn the mute's alphabet, Ned, so as to be able to converse with her. I've always considered that a woman's tongue is the greatest drawback she can possibly possess.

"Mother's told me of your odd sentiments, Herbert, before now. Well, I'm sure you'll like Miss Curtis. She has an interesting, lovely face, and is really very clever in her own *quiet* way. Mother is very fond of her, and so am I."

His cousin's words filled Herbert Lawrence with no slight curiosity to meet Miss Mary Curtis, and on arriving at his aunt's house one pleasant afternoon, about a fortnight later, the young gentleman felt that his curiosity had been growing stronger and stronger during his journey to Greenlawn.

"I say, Aunt Charlotte," he remarked, while occupying with Mrs. Ogden the tasteful little drawing-room into which he had been shown, "has *she* gone yet?"

"Whom, Herbert?" asked his aunt, opening her eyes in genuine astonishment at the interested manner which accompanied her nephew's use of the feminine pronoun.

"Why, Miss Curtis," was the reply. "Edward told me that she was staying with you. A charming, lovely girl, with the rare attribute of not being able to talk. I was really quite anxious to meet so precious a social curiosity. I'm sure we should like each other."

"Yes, Herbert, Miss Curtis is still staying here," responded his aunt, after a moment of hesitation; "would you like to be presented?"

"Above all things. Of course I sha'n't be able to converse with her, unless you teach me the manner of doing so. Is it hard to learn, by-the-way?"

Mrs. Ogden appeared not to have heard his question, however, and left the room a moment after it was spoken. She remained absent an unusually long time, Herbert thought, considering that her errand was so trivial a one as merely to inform Miss Curtis that he desired an introduction.

"Perhaps she's assisting the fair mute in her toilet," he meditated. "I suppose deaf and dumb girls share the flippancies of their talkative sisterhood. Women are still women, perhaps, even without their right of speech."

His aunt returned presently, accompanied by a young lady, who struck Herbert, the moment his eyes rested upon her, as exceedingly and fascinatingly beautiful. A mass of soft, wavy hair was brushed back from the whitest forehead imaginable. Two dark, lustrous eyes looked out from beneath golden lashes. A mouth of the most enchantingly sweet expression smiled amiably upon him, as Mrs. Ogden said, or rather *motioned*, using her fingers as a means of communication:

"Let me present Mr. Herbert Lawrence."

There was a somewhat awkward pause after the introduction had taken place, but Mrs. Ogden soon broke it by addressing Herbert.

"As you are unacquainted with the alphabet for mutes, I have requested Mary to bring paper and pencil. She converses very fluently in this way, if I may use the term. You will find her ready to reply almost before you have written your sentences."

Herbert glanced towards the young lady who was now seated opposite him, although at considerable distance; and as their eyes met, with a charmingly graceful gesture Miss Curtis pointed to a vacant chair at her side, using in the action a roll of tinted notepaper which she held.

Not long afterwards Mrs. Ogden was a smiling observer of her two guests, while they sat, with a small table between them, engaged in what appeared to be a conversation absorbing as it was silent. Herbert Lawrence soon found that the fair mute with whom he held communication was one of the most accomplished and brilliant women whom it had ever been his lot to meet. She wrote with a brevity, wit, and style that quite put to shame his own literary powers, and accompanied this *tête-à-tête*, to Herbert so novel and agreeable, with

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smiles and glances that were something more than merely attractive. Her quick perception of the ideas which he wished to express considerably lightened Herbert's labours with the pencil, and she bore her own share of the chirographic interview with an ease that truly surprised him. "Are you at all tired?" he wrote, at the end of an hour. Her answer was a prompt negative.

Miss Curtis did not appear at dinner that afternoon, nor yet at breakfast on the following morning; though this absence from meals—caused, as Mrs. Ogden told her nephew, by a feeling of sensitiveness before the servants that were strange to her—was the young lady's only evidence of being conscious how severe and alienating was her affliction. When in the society of Herbert and his aunt her bright, smiling looks were the very reverse of that melancholy which might have been so easily accounted for had she really exhibited it. Before two days had elapsed Herbert found himself forgetting her true condition, and assuming towards her a gay carelessness of manner that appeared thoroughly natural, and during the week which followed his stay at Greenlawn Cottage became every hour more agreeable. Before the end of that week—let us announce a plain fact plainly—Herbert Lawrence had told himself that he devotedly loved Mary Curtis.

At last it happened that one evening, as Mrs. Ogden was seated alone in that same pleasant little drawing-room where her nephew had first met the present possessor of his heart, Herbert entered, and approaching her side, said, in slow, calm tones:

"I have come to tell you, Aunt Charlotte, that this is to be my last night at Greenlawn. I shall be forced to leave to-morrow morning."

"Is not your intention a very recently formed one, Herbert?" Mrs. Ogden asked, in surprised tones.

"Yes—no—that is, I began to think of going yesterday morning." Then, after a slight silence, he continued: "Perhaps you care about hearing, aunt, my true reason for quitting Greenlawn to-morrow?"

"I should like to hear it, Herbert. Your going is a great disappointment to me. Miss Curtis and I had expected the pleasure of your society for at least a week longer."

"Does Miss Curtis think my society a pleasure?"

"Yes; I am sure that she does."

Another silence, which Herbert again broke.

"Well, aunt, my reason for going is simply this—I love Mary Curtis."

Mrs. Ogden started up from her seat with a little gasp of amazement.

"*You love any living woman*, Herbert! I can't believe it!"

"Nevertheless, it is true. I don't know why I make this confession to you, Aunt Charlotte, since of course I have not made it to her."

"And why not, Herbert?"

"Do you ask me?" he responded, with a thrill of intense mournfulness in his voice. "How could a confession of love from me to her be anything but the worst of mockeries?"

"You mean——?"

"I mean that the world would laugh at me if I made that unhappy girl my wife, and that we would both be pointed at afterwards as curiosities, in whatever society we entered. Not that I care much for the world's opinion, aunt, but in matters of this sort a man cannot wilfully disregard it. I could bear the ridicule, perhaps; but that *she* should be subjected to it is quite another matter. "No, no," he went on almost passionately, "even loving her as I do, it is better that I should make no effort towards discovering whether my love is returned. Do you not agree with me?"

Mrs. Ogden's face was concealed from Herbert's as she answered him, and a kind of faint tremulousness in her voice showed a depth of sympathy that he had not expected to find. Herbert was aware that his aunt fondly loved him, but he was nevertheless not a little surprised at her prompt compassion for the pain he suffered.

"I scarcely know how to answer your question, Herbert," Mrs. Ogden said. "Were certain prejudices of yours not well-known to me—had you not spoken, even before meeting Miss Curtis, as though you looked upon her affliction as almos a charm—had not——"

"I understand you, aunt," he interrupted. "I acted, thought, and spoke very foolishly, if you will, but I see my folly now. There is melody in the voices of those we love which no other sound equals. I think that if Mary Curtis could find a voice, and tell me that she would be my wife, Herbert Lawrence might safely call himself the happiest of living men."

"Then call yourself so at once, Herbert, for I *have* found a voice, and mean to keep it all the rest of my days."

"Can I believe my senses?" Herbert Lawrence gasped, as none other than Miss Curtis now glided across the room to where he was standing, and paused, her beautiful face a picture of roguish merriment, close at his side.

Mrs. Ogden gave vent to a peal of the noisiest laughter, and approached her nephew, managing to secure both his hands in both her own, and fixing upon him a pair of eyes that literally danced with fun.

"It was all my doing, you horrid woman-hater, and I am very glad that I did it, too. It's taught you a lesson that I hope you will never forget. Of course, if Alice had not been so perfectly charming I should have had very slight hopes of making you fall in love with her, and thereby prove to yourself what an essential attribute of woman is woman's tongue. Perhaps you're surprised at my calling her Alice and not Mary. Her elder sister, Mary, who *is* deaf and dumb, poor darling, had left Greenlawn a few days before your arrival, and Alice's visit had only just begun. There's the whole story in a nutshell. Alice never dreamt of deceiving you, nor I either, until your idiotic remark about poor Mary being a precious social curiosity vexed me into bringing about the whole affair."

Herbert and Alice Curtis are man and wife now, and a very devoted couple they make.

F. Wills.

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A Sorrowful Tale of a Man who would not Trust his Sweetheart.

RODNEY DANE and Alice Farley sat on the verandah together, and he had been reading to her. Suddenly the latter looked up, and asked:

"Would you wholly trust the woman you love, Rodney?"

"Wholly," he answered. "There must be entire faith or no faith at all. Where there is not confidence there cannot be love. The woman whom I love," he added, smiling down into the face upturned to his, with a look in his eyes that brought to it a flush like that you see in the heart of wild roses when the sunshine first coaxes their petals apart, "will trust me wholly, as I shall trust her. I think *you* would trust me too, Alice, for you are the woman I love."

Then he bent down and kissed her, and the woman who was watching them from behind the curtains of a window close by shut her hands fiercely together, and her face was full of jealous pain as she witnessed the caress.

"I wonder what he would think if he knew what I do?" she whispered. "I wonder"—with a look of perplexity on her face—"if Alice Farley *is* deceiving him? It does not seem possible that she is capable of such deceit, and yet—what else can one think when they see what I have seen? If he knew—if he only knew!"

That afternoon, as Rodney Dane and Alice Farley were walking up and down the path that led along the river bank, Margaret Worth joined them.

"We have been talking about ghosts," Alice said. "I believe in them, and Rodney does not. What do you think about them?"

"I am half inclined to believe in them," answered Miss Worth, "though I have always been sceptical on the subject; but last night I saw one, I think. It was just as the clock was striking twelve—the traditional hour for ghosts, you know—when I saw what convinced me that there were stranger things in earth than I had dreamt of. I was sitting by my window, for I had had a headache all day, and was unable to sleep. I happened to look down the path, and I saw a ghostly figure coming towards the place where we are now standing. It was too far off for me to be able to distinguish its features, but in general appearance it resembled you, Miss Farley."

Alice Farley's face turned suddenly white, and the hand that was toying with a rose shook with some strong emotion. Then, feeling that Rodney Dane's eyes were on her, a strange, guilty-looking flush took the place of the pallor that Miss Worth's words seemed to have occasioned.

"It must have been a ghost in love," went on Miss Worth, with her keen eyes on Miss Farley's face, to note the effect of her words; "for it had evidently come to keep a ghostly tryst. It was met by another ghost, and the meeting was very much like that of lovers who are in the flesh."

Alice Farley's face was white again now, and the eyes she lifted for a moment to Rodney Dane's had a frightened look in them.

"Did you dream this, or is it a little romance of the imagination for our amusement?" asked Dane, mystified by Miss Worth's words and manner, and their effect on Alice Farley.

"I did not dream what I have told you about, and I did not imagine it," answered Miss Worth. "I saw precisely what I have told you. If I did not see ghosts, what did I see?"

"Don't let's talk about such things," Alice said, with a shiver. "The river has a tempting look—take us out for a row, Rodney."

But the river could not charm away the spell that Miss Worth's strange words had left behind them. Rodney Dane could not help wondering what meaning lay hidden under them, and Alice Farley knew well enough what he was thinking about.

"The little rift within the lute," Miss Worth kept whispering to herself, exultantly, as her keen eyes saw what thoughts were at work.

That evening Rodney Dane met Margaret Worth in the hall.

"What did you mean to-day?" he asked, in an imperative tone.

"I meant—I scarcely know what," she answered. "But your talk about ghosts brought to my mind what I had seen and I spoke of it."

"Of course you did not expect us to think that you thought you had really seen a ghost," he said. "What was it, or, rather, who was it, that you saw? I am curious to know, you see, what romantic maiden holds midnight meetings with her lover."

"I cannot tell you that, because I do not know," she answered. "It looked like Miss Farley, but it scarcely seems possible that it could have been she."

"Of course it was *not* she," said Dane, but for all he spoke so decidedly, Miss Worth knew that there was a sort of doubt—or perhaps fear was a better word to use—at work in his mind. It was a feeling he could give no name to, as yet, because it was so vague; but because of that vagueness it was all the more tormenting.

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It was on the following night that Rodney Dane saw the ghost that Miss Worth had seen.

He was sitting at the window, watching the lurid effect with which frequent flashes of lightning lit up a world of darkness. He could never sleep during a thunderstorm, so he stood looking out of the window.

A vivid flash made the landscape light as day, and showed to him a woman's figure stealing down the path. Before the lurid light had died away, the woman looked back as if fearful of being seen, and he saw the face of Alice Farley.

"Heavens," he cried, "where can she be going on such a night as this, and at such a time?" He threw up the sash and leant out into the night. Another flash showed her to him further down the path. Then there was quite an interval of darkness. When the next flash came, it showed him the woman he loved with a man's arm about her, and he saw her face lifted for a kiss.

The rest of that night was like a hideous dream to him. He scarcely knew what he was about as he made preparations to leave the place where his dream of life had come to him, and the terrible awakening from it.

"False! False!" he kept saying.

When morning came he was ready to go. He hoped to get away without seeing Alice, but he did not.

She met him in the hall.

"I am going away," he said, while his face was white. "I can scarcely be expected to stay longer after what I saw last night."

She grew pale to the lips.

"Oh, Rodney, if you only knew!' she cried. "Believe me, you would not blame me if you knew."

"Perhaps not," he answered coldly. "But not knowing, I judge by what I see."

"Oh, Rodney, trust me!" she cried. "You shall know the truth by-and-bye. I would explain it all to you now, but I dare not, until——"

"And yet you ask me to trust you!" he cried, breaking in upon her with words full of cruel scorn and unbelief. "I wish to Heaven I had never seen you—I hope I shall never look into your face again."

Then he turned away, and a moment later was gone; while Alice Farley stood there speechless and pale as death, and listened to the sound of his departing feet, and felt in a kind of numb way that her heart was breaking.

A week later Rodney Dane heard that Alice Farley had left her father's house for ever. Why, no one knew, but she was gone, and her father had forbidden anyone to speak of her to him. "Let it be as if she were dead," he said.

* * * * *

Five-and-twenty years after that day when he looked for the last time, as he believed, on the fair, false face of Alice Farley, Rodney Dane and his son were sitting in the private parlour of Dr. Graham's Asylum for the Insane. Dr. Graham had been Dane's schoolmate; Dane had come to visit Dr. Graham, bringing with him the young man who bore his name, and had a face so like his own that he was often startled at the likeness. It almost seemed as if he saw himself living life over again.

"I never saw a more striking resemblance," Dr. Graham said. "Looking at him I see you as you were at his age, and it seems as if you had kept your youth, while I have grown old."

By-and-bye, when the young man had left them, the two grey-haired men talked about the happenings of the years since they had seen each other.

"The last time I saw you, you will remember, was when you were on your way to some country place," Dr. Graham said. "From what you said to me I inferred that you expected to win a wife while there. Did you do so?"

Rodney Dane's face paled at the question. Five-and twenty years had not healed the wound that Alice Farley's supposed falseness had left in his heart. For, although he had tried to forget her, or, at least, to kill the love he had felt for her, he had never been able to do so. There had never been a day that he had not seen her as he saw her that last time, with the anguish of a breaking heart in her face. That look haunted him at night. It came to him like the ghost of something he had murdered. Though he told himself that she was false, and deserved no pity from him, he could not think of her without a strange thrill of regret and sorrow. For, you see, he had loved her as a man can love but once.

"No," he answered with a sigh, "I did not win the woman I told you of; or, rather, I won her and I lost her. You knew the woman I married—Margaret Worth—I think."

"I knew her well," Dr. Graham replied. "I used to think she cared more for you than she did for anyone else, but I never thought you would marry her."

"Things seldom happen as we think they are going to," Rodney Dane said, with a sigh. "Yes, I married Margaret Worth, and she was a faithful wife to me for many years. *She*, at least, was true," he added, while the memory of one who was false stirred his heart. He wondered if she were living or dead. For five-and-twenty years she had been dead to the world he lived in, but the grass of the grave might not be growing over her yet.

When young Rodney Dane joined them, after his walk through the grounds, Dr. Graham proposed that they should visit the Asylum.

"I have some strange cases under my charge," he said, as they entered the wards. "There is one," pointing to a woman who was standing at a window, looking out as if she hoped to see someone she had long been looking for, but who never came. Her face was hidden from them, but the snow-white hair that fell upon her neck told that she was no longer young.

"She has been here nearly fifteen years," Dr. Graham said. "Her story, told me by her brother, who put her in my charge just before his death, is like a leaf from a romance. This brother, years and years ago, was suspected of having committed a terrible crime. His father believed him guilty, and to save his life he fled from the home of his boyhood. Only one person had believed his story of innocence, and that person was his sister.

"For five years he wandered about the world, an outcast. Then the longing came over him to visit his old home again. He went back to it as a stranger, daring to make his identity known only to his sister, who had never lost her belief in his innocence. She met her brother secretly; but it seems that her lover witnessed their last meeting, and, believing that she was false, he left her in anger. She dared not tell him the truth, fearing that her father, who was a stern, unforgiving man, would set the police on the fugitive's track. In some manner, her father found out the truth, after all, and he was furious with wrath because she had disobeyed his command that she should never see her brother again. She was strong in her belief in that brother's innocence, and dared to say so. Then the old man, in his bitter, cruel wrath, drove *her* from home, and she sought refuge with her brother. Her trouble brought on a long illness. When bodily health came back, her mind was a wreck. Her brother kept her with him until he knew that he had not long to live. Then he put her in my charge, and she has been here ever since; and probably will still remain here, as her father died long ago, and she has no relatives. Since her brother died, I have been told that his innocence has been fully established by the confession of the guilty party. She seldom speaks to anybody, but is always watching and waiting for someone."

Rodney Dane's face had grown very pale as he listened to his old friend's story. Was it the story of the woman he loved that was being told him? Something assured him that it was.

The woman at the window turned suddenly, and faced them. Thus, after five-and-twenty years, Rodney Dane and Alice Farley met again. A cry, that had the sound of a sob in it, broke from the woman's lips. She sprang forward with outstretched hands.

"Oh! Rodney, Rodney, I have been waiting for this time so long, so long!" she cried, and her poor pale face was full of the unutterable pathos of the dead years. "I was not false to you, Rodney. Believe me!—oh! believe me!"

But her hands were not reached out to the Rodney Dane

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who had been her lover. Instead, she stood before his son, and to him her passionate plea was uttered.

"Alice," the Rodney of her past said, gently. "I am the man you mean. This man whom you mistake for me is my son. Have I changed so that you do not know me?"

"No, I do not know you," she said, looking at him as one might look at an utter stranger. "I never knew you. But you, Rodney—you have not grown a day older, it seems to me, than you were when I saw you last; while I—I have grown to be an old, old woman."

Young Rodney Dane looked from one to the other in perplexity.

"Alice," his father said, hoping to make the truth clear to her bewildered brain, "you are mistaken. This is another Rodney Dane. I am the one you knew."

"Why do you tell me that?" she cried. "I know better. You are an old man. This is the Rodney I knew," turning to the young man again. "Oh, Rodney, the man you saw me with was not my lover, but my brother, and I would have told you the truth, if you had trusted me a little. But you would not, and my heart broke when you left me, thinking I was false. Do you remember, Rodney, you said you prayed God you might never see my face again? But *I* prayed we might meet some time before I died, that I might tell you that I was true to you; and my prayer, not yours, has been answered. I could not die until I had told you the truth. Oh, Rodney, tell me that at last you believe me, and let me die in peace."

Rodney Dane signed to his son to give her the assurance she desired.

"I believe you," the young man said, with a strange feeling of being someone else. To his father it seemed, as he listened to the words that were meant for him addressed to another, as if he had died years ago, and this young man was the ghost of his former self.

"He believes me, and tells me so!" she cried, and her face was full of unutterable gladness. "I can die now."

She wavered like a reed in the wind, and would have fallen if her old lover had not sprung forward and caught her.

"The end's here," she whispered, her eyes on the young man's face—a look full of love that had outlived the sorrowful years. "Tell me again that you believe me, and kiss me once—just once, Rodney—to seal the peace between us."

Young Rodney Dane felt moved by something outside of himself. A great wave of tenderness for the woman who was lying in his father's arms swept over him. It was as if he became, for the time being, the man who loved her. He drew her to his breast and kissed her, and the man whose heart was mightily stirred by the love of long ago was obliged to see the kiss he longed to give, given by another.

"Good-bye," she said faintly, a great light coming into her face and making it radiant. "Sometime—sometime——"

Yes; sometime, somewhere, poor, weary heart, the tangled threads of Fate will be straightened out, and then——

There was a little flutter of the hands, one last look of love that could never die, and the woman Rodney Dane loved was dead in the arms of another. And it seemed to him that this was his punishment for his lack of faith in her, years ago, and a great sense of loss came over him as he looked through tears upon the face of the dead.

H. Trangmar.

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The Slave's Revenge.

"The stomach," says Souvestre, "is a slave which is obliged to accept everything imposed upon it, and finally avenges its wrongs with the slyness and cruelty of a slave."

The eminent French author has happily expressed an important physical fact. When one comes to reflect upon it, there is something unique and pitiable about the position of the stomach in the human body. Upon no other organ except the lungs can you impose anything from the outside world. And it is your interest as well as your desire to draw into your lungs pure, fresh air only. And air in some form is the only thing the lungs ever receive. On the other hand, the stomach is a general receptacle, entirely at the mercy of its owner as to what shall be put into it, when, where, and how much. A man can throw into it anything that can be swallowed—every variety of food, any sort of drink, any amount of both, up to the bag's elastic capacity; and, if he wants to, he can put a layer of marbles on top, and finish off with prussic acid.

The point is, as M. Souvestre says, that this most important of all our organs is our slave. It cannot resist, it cannot call the police, it has no recourse to the law; it just takes what comes, and abides its time. But how to take care of the health, how to prevent the outbreak of ailments, is a problem much more complex than it seems to be. Therefore, when the enslaved and outraged stomach turns and lashes its owner with the cat-o'-nine-tails called dyspepsia, it must not be assumed, offhand, that the owner *intended* to drive his servant to desperation.

Mr. Thomas Anderton, of 50 Mill Lane, Newcastle-on-Tyne, described in writing on June 3rd, 1897, how his stomach punished him, and what he did to cure his ills. He said: "For many years I suffered from indigestion and weakness. My appetite was bad, and after eating I had pain at the chest and bowels. I never felt well rested, was heavy and weary, got very weak, and at times had to leave my work. I tried several medicines, and spent pounds in physic, but got little benefit. A friend told me of the benefit he derived from taking Mother Seigel's Syrup. I got a bottle of this medicine, and after taking it could eat well, and the food agreed with me. I soon found that the medicine was doing me more good than anything I had taken. By taking a dose now and again I keep in good health."

It will be seven years next June since Mr. Anderton made that statement, and he has not been ill since—his stomach lashes him no more. Read for yourself what he says to us in a letter dated at his old home, on February 15th, this year: "Gentlemen, it may interest you to know that since sending you my testimony in 1897 to the value of Mother Seigel's Syrup, I have continued to enjoy good health. I still take the medicine as I need it, and would not be without it in the house. When I think of how I suffered I am sorry I did not know of it sooner. I never had a proper night's rest, and I became so weak and languid that I could not work. Nothing did me any good but Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. That *cured* me, and I shall always be grateful."

It is better never to be sick, but when we do fall ill it is a grand fact that a cure is at hand in the form of Mother Seigel's Syrup, which soothes the stomach and transforms it once more into a willing and faithful servant—not a rebellious slave.

A Woman's Power.

The smiles and favour of a beautiful woman are heaven enough for most men. But beauty and grace in women are founded on good health. Good health depends on good digestion, and that invariably follows the use of Mother Seigel's Syrup, a tonic made of roots and herbs. Beauty and strength spring up beside it, as flowers on a sunny slope. It brightens the eyes, clears the skin, and gives vigour, vivacity, and health to the languid and weak. All women need it occasionally.

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RIVALS FOR SOPHIE.

A Sad, Sorrowful Tale of a Practical Joke.

Johnson and I were rivals — bitter, wicked, deadly rivals — and the object of our dual affections was a young lady named Sophonisba Robinson.

Now, so far as priority of acquaintance goes, I certainly had the advantage over Johnson, for it was at a small party given by my parents in celebration of my fifth birthday, that Sophie and I first met. She was about three and a half, and well do I remember her a plump, apple-cheeked, golden-haired, blue-eyed little darling, in a white muslin frock with a pink sash.

She came in with her mamma, who led her up to me, saying:

"Now, Sophie, dear, take your finger out of your mouth, and kiss the little boy, and give him his popgun."

Sophie did so. From that moment I felt that she was mine; and I have continued to feel the same thing (on and off) ever since.

For many years, however, a cruel Fate kept us apart. Then we met again; and I found that the old, old wound was still there. I also found that Johnson had a wound of a similar nature, and the discovery was not altogether pleasing, for Johnson is rather a good-looking fellow, and no end of a ladies' man, while an excessive natural modesty prevents me shining in society as I otherwise might.

Before I discovered his unfortunate partiality for Sophonisba, Johnson and I had been the best of friends; from that moment we were implacable foes, perpetually plotting and planning to undermine and out each other out.

Johnson found that Miss Robinson played tennis, and he wasted a whole month's salary in getting a suitable rig-out, and joining her club. The very next week Sophonisba resigned.

Then I discovered by accident that she was passionately fond of boating, and I spent no end of time and money in learning how to row. When I considered myself a sufficiently skilful sculler, I invited Sophonisba to spend an afternoon with me on the river. We went; and never shall I forget it. It was a glorious day in midsummer.

The great sun shone; the little birds sang; the tall trees rocked in the breeze; the golden corn waved, and all that sort of thing; and there, like an angel in the stern of the boat, beautiful, radiant, and gracious, sat Sophonisba, *my* Sophonisba.

"Oh! Sophie! Sophonisba!" I thought, "if in one boat we two might float adown the stream of Life together, how happy would I be."

I was just getting up steam to make this remark aloud to Miss Robinson when I caught sight of my hated rival, Johnson, standing on the river-bank, sniggering.

Of course I felt considerably upset and put out. The next moment, in my excitement, I caught a crab, upset the boat, and we were both put out. Fortunately for me (for I can't swim) we were in very shallow water, so, after about two minutes' struggling and gasping, I managed to recover my feet, and having wiped from my eyes the mud I had gathered at the bottom of the river, I looked anxiously round for Sophonisba.

Would you believe it? That wretched, interfering Johnson (who, by-the-bye, can swim like a fish) had actually dived in and rescued her. Why didn't he leave her alone? What had it to do with him? I daresay I could have got her out myself. Anyhow, I should have tried. Then, again, what right had he to take her home, leaving me to tow the boat back?

It was about six weeks later that Sophie and I met again. Then I found her just as gracious as ever—only it was to Johnson instead of to me.

But I didn't give in. Sophonisba could sing, so I endeavoured to regain her affections by playing her accompaniments. Then that Johnson was so abominably mean as to sing love-duets with her behind my back, while I played.

Next I tried to wheedle her affections with the violin. Johnson retaliated with the banjo and comic songs. I went in for the hornpipe, and Johnson came out with the Highland sword dance in costume. Then I gave a series of recitals in heavy tragedy, and Johnson gave a course of entertainments in parlour magic and table turning.

So we went on, hammer and tongs, until Johnson and I bade fair to become the two most accomplished young men in our town. And at the end of it all Sophonisba seemed to dislike us about equally.

But this kind of thing couldn't go on for ever, and it was equally certain that we couldn't both marry her.

So I determined to bring the matter to an issue. I redoubled my exertions, straining every nerve; and at last, after having been on my knees in a moist conservatory for half an hour and five minutes, I managed to wring from Sophonisba the confession that she "was not altogether indifferent to me, but she was afraid her father would never consent." Of course I suggested an elopement, and after a proper amount of hesitation Sophonisba consented.

It was arranged that I was to hire a carriage and call for Sophie at the house of a friend, and, in order to disarm the suspicions of this friend, I was to go closely disguised as a lady. Then we were to drive to Euston, proceeding thence by train to some friends of mine in the North of England; and the next morning we were to be married by special license.

I will not weary you by detailing the hopes and fears that alternated within my bosom, when the eventful evening at length actually arrived. Suffice it to say that I went; that I found Sophonisba waiting, closely wrapped and veiled ready for our journey; that she entered the carriage, and we drove off into the darkness.

How can I describe the bliss of that moment. I felt that at last I had triumphed indeed, and I positively gloated over the thought of the awful misery that would come upon Johnson when he heard of our elopement, and then to think that Sophonisba Robinson was mine at last!

I could scarcely wait until we were a safe distance from the house, before I turned to seize her in my arms, and imprint one long passionate kiss upon her lips—and I came in contact with a *heavy moustache!* It wasn't Sophonisba after all! It was Johnson!

It was only too true; Sophonisba had deceived us both; had induced us to adopt ridiculous disguises, and then made us elope with each other.

I need not say how sadly and quietly Johnson and I sought our respective homes that evening.

One word more. Sophonisba is married now. Johnson and I are warm friends again—but we are both bachelors.

R. Panfold.

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[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Matrimony for Managers.

"CONSTANT READER."—I don't think your letter at all childish, and your case interests me very much. You are twenty-three, and still unattached. You have worked in a situation for seven years and are now manager at a decent salary, and your master informs you that it is almost essential you should soon be married. You have never had an attachment in your life, but have a comfortable home. There are no nice girls in your neighbourhood. You hate dancing, and would not speak to a girl without introduction.

* * * * *

Altogether, you seem just the sort of man who would make a girl a good husband. But that you have never had an attachment suggests that you are not of a very affectionate disposition. That does not matter so very much, for many men do not develop that part of their character until much later in life. Your master may be quite right, from his point of view, that you should soon get married. But it seems rather hard to expect you to produce the woman of your heart at such short notice. As he seems to have such an interest in you, why not ask him to take you in hand himself, and introduce you to his own circle? Many masters anxious to find wives for their model *employés* have gone so far as to give their own daughters. Instead of looking about casually for a girl, try to get your master to help you in your search. He must be able to do so. For my own part, as you must know, if you have read *Short Stories*, it is impossible for me to undertake to introduce readers to each other, as if I consented in one case, I could not refuse in another, and that would turn this paper into a matrimonial agency.

❦❦❦

To Squash Slanders.

So, "LAURA," some kind friend has been spreading slanderous stories about you, and you wish to bring it home to somebody. You believe it to be a certain young lady of your acquaintance, but cannot be sure about it. What you say is important—to stop the slanders spreading, and to make the person who started them apologise. What do I recommend?

* * * * *

You must be very careful not to fix the blame on the wrong person. Even if the lady you suspect had something to do with the affair, for all you know her own conduct may have been quite blameless. I advise you to do as I have often advised other readers. When next you meet the young lady, tell her that you have reason to believe that somebody has been spreading false stories about you. Point out that these stories are doing you great injury, and that they must at once stop. You need not accuse anybody, but the gentle hint you will thus give the person you suspect may extract a confession, and, in any case, will certainly convey a warning. If, later on, you succeed in tracing the source of the slanders, I do not advise legal proceedings, as they seldom result satisfactorily in private affairs. But if you can force the person to apologise you will have done the best thing possible.

Wants Curly Hair.

"I HAVE got soft, straight hair," writes "P. O. T." "Can you give me a remedy for making it curly?"

* * * * *

This is the first time I have heard of "soft, straight hair" as requiring a "remedy." "P. O. T." evidently does not know that her kind of hair is often quite as becoming as curly hair. No young man is likely to admire her more for curls which are artificially made. I take it that "P. O. T." *is* a young lady. That such a question would bother a young man seems scarcely likely.

❦❦❦

Dance Matters.

A LADY you have met at a dance, "V. B.," is not compelled by etiquette to recognise a partner on meeting him afterwards. If she likes, she can do so, or not, as the case may be. In any case, it rests with the lady.

* * * * *

The best way, at a dance, for an engaged young man to avoid causing his sweetheart jealousy, is to dance with the older and less beautiful lady guests—preferably those of the maternal and dowager type. It is doing the old ladies a kindness, and young men often find them strangely interesting and attractive if properly dealt with.

❦❦❦

A Cooling-off.

"PERPLEXED."—I think the coolness you speak of in the young lady to whom you are engaged must be the result of some falling-off in your affections. After a year's engagement it is quite often that little things happen which cause slight misunderstandings. Unless these affairs are instantly cleared up, the coolness increases, and the two parties find themselves drawn apart.

* * * * *

Now, this seems to have occurred in your case. Evidently your *fiancée* feels that you have not been properly attentive to her. Perhaps she has got wind of the friendship which has sprung up between yourself and the other young lady. She certainly feels slighted in some way. It is now your plain duty to declare your own feelings. You confess that the second young lady seems to be fonder of you; that she seems to have a nicer character; and more "true love." You admit that you feel yourself beginning to love her. Now this cannot have happened unless you have fallen off in some way towards your *fiancée*. My advice to you is to definitely choose between the two girls. The second girl seems to me to promise to make you the truer wife. As the first girl has offered to release you from your engagement, you have it in your own hands to break off. If your affection for her is waning, it will have waned almost entirely in another year. Better avoid all deception and declare your intentions at once.

❦❦❦

Between the Tiffs.

"ARTHUR" was introduced to a girl some months ago, understanding her to be engaged to a young man also known to him. The other day he again met this girl, and on inquiring for her *fiancé*, was informed that the two had quarrelled, and were no longer seeing each other. As "ARTHUR" was very much struck with the girl, he asks: "Would it be safe now for me to pay her attentions?"

* * * * *

That is for the girl to decide. As she is free, apparently, from her engagement with the other man, there is nothing to prevent your showing her attention. She will soon enough pull you up if it should turn out that she is really in love with the other man. It is a trifle risky to step in so soon after the breach, as tiffs like that between lovers have a way of healing themselves, and the person who steps in between usually comes out worst in the encounter.

Cynthia

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